The Middlebury Campus

VOL. CXXII, No. 17 | MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT, APRIL 4, 2024 | middleburycampus.com

The Staff Issue

After nearly two years, staff still give mixed reviews on 'skill matrix' compensation system

By MAGGIE REYNOLDS
Editor in Chief

TOM NEVINS / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Middlebury staff have mixed reaction to the skill matrix compensation system, unveiled by Human Resources in July 2022.

Employers in the United States have shown trends of movement from performance- or tenure-based compensation systems to skill-based compensation models in recent years. Middlebury is no exception.

The college department of Human Resources unveiled a new skill-based compensation system, known as the "skill matrix" system, in July 2022.

About a year and half since the program's implementation, staff have largely positive feelings toward the system's prioritization of higher pay for the college's lowest paid employees, and Human Resources' efforts to be transparent about the system. Employees still have concerns, however, about uneven interpretation of the system across departments of the college, the hard cap for employees at the high end of their salary range and how job descriptions are used to benchmark positions to the market.

"Compensation is huge. It is so important to employees, so central to work," said Colleen Norden, a systems and communications specialist at the Center for Teaching, Learning and Research (CTLR) and president of Staff Council "You can say 'yay,' it's great to work at a higher education institution with a wonderful mission, all the great students we get to work with, but the reality is wages are essential."

The current compensation system established a pay grade range for each position, based on comparison to wages at a group of schools determined to be peer institutions, which include Roger Williams University and Suffolk University. In the past, staff members have raised concerns about the grouping of peer institutions, given that Roger Williams' endowment is $88 million and Suffolk's endowment is $255 million compared to Middlebury's $1.47 billion endowment.

Within the pay grade range, employees are placed into the skill matrix categories of either "learning," "growing," "thriving" or "leading," which correspond to 0%, 25%, 50% and 60% of the market range, respectively. Human Resources aimed to fully fund the 'leading' category to 75% of the market range, but it did not reach that goal for this fiscal year.

"It is still a priority to get it to 75% and it's also a priority to continue to invest in compensation for all employees," Caitlin Goss, vice president of human resources and chief people officer, told The Campus.

The system also raised the minimum wage at the college to $17.60 an hour, according to Goss. While Middlebury's minimum wage has increased substantially since early 2020, a livable wage in Addison County for a single adult with no children is $23.33 per hour, according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator.

Staff members' placement within the skill matrix categories is reviewed by their supervisors yearly. Employees who do not receive a skill matrix bump are eligible for extra discretionary money — between $500 and $3,000 in increments of $500 — or one-time payments for those who are already at the cap of their

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Understaffing poses challenges for staff in dining halls, Davis Family Library

By TEJAS SRINIVASAN
Editor at Large

Days when the usual dishes are replaced with paper plates and utensils in Ross Dining Hall are a sign that the dishroom is overwhelmed, and when the pizza station is shut down, it is a sign that the cooks are occupied at other stations. Students lining up for food can easily spot the understaffing that affects the dining hall's workflow.

While staffing at Middlebury has improved since the pandemic, some areas of campus still struggle with short staffing. The dining halls and Davis Library are two places where understaffing is still taking a toll.

Some of the burdens of understaffing are visible to the public eye, but others can only be felt by staff members themselves. In the dining hall, jobs that are located in the back, unseen by students passing through, are some of the most impacted positions.

Dan Detora, executive director of food service operations, described the ways in which dining services are coping with staffing issues.

"At times we have had as many as 17 open positions. It has resulted in employees working overtime, long work weeks and just being overworked daily." Detora wrote in an email to The Campus. "Fortunately, we are now seeing more applicants and currently only have a few open positions."

A full-time employee at Ross Dining Hall who wished to remain anonymous spoke to The Campus about how the loss of necessary employees has greatly affected their job hours.

"We just lost a full-timer, so it's

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JUNE SU / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The past year has seen dining hall menu and time changes due to understaffing.

THE WOMAN WHO REVOLUTIONIZED THE DINING HALL EXPERIENCE

By KATIE FUTTERMAN
Managing Editor

KATIE FUTTERMAN/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Swan loves to joke with students while asking trivia questions every Sunday.

Kathy Swan's warm, cheerful voice turned a dining hall into a home. All it took was picking up a microphone.

Swan has been a checker at Proctor Dining hall for four years now, and has always held close relationships with the students.

"I just started talking to the kids and a lot of the kids open up. They're very friendly. I kind of watch out for everybody and make sure everybody's okay. I just love talking to the kids. They're really sweet," Swan said.

For a while, however, Swan started to nearly lose her voice from all that talking. Dining Services Manager Dawn Boise overheard her trying to warn students of Proctor's impending closing time, and joked that she should use the microphone, which sits in a box above the sundae station and is sometimes used during Language Schools.

This past fall, Swan took Boise up on the offer. Swan recalled being shy and nervous at first, but to her delight, everyone seemed to love it. She likes the ability to interact with students beyond the quick interaction when they swipe their ID cards.

Swan first experimented with announcing birthdays, which remain her favorite.

"Sometimes I embarrass kids," Swan laughed. "But they get over it."

But she also continues to innovate on the microphone. Swan regularly announces sports games and results, and will also announce dance recitals, students getting into graduate schools and more upon request.

"The field hockey team always has breakfast in Proc before our home games, and this year we have loved having her on the microphone at breakfast to cheer for us and encourage people to attend our games. It makes us feel so supported and is one of those things that makes game days at Middlebury so fun!" Meg Shelburne '24 wrote in a message to The Campus.

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"OUR CAMPUSES ARE BEAUTIFUL, ALL IN THEIR DIFFERENT WAYS"

How staff across the country help run Middlebury

By RYAN McELROY
Managing Editor

From up Route 125 to Ripton, Vt., down the coast to Washington, D.C. and across the country in Monterey, Calif., staff members across Middlebury's far-flung campuses are crucial to the college's success and its reputation outside of the Green Mountain State.

Many employees have worked for the college's non-Vermont programs for decades, quietly solving problems and eagerly greeting each new generation of students, faculty and administrators. Others are recent additions to the Middlebury ecosystem, bringing new energy to their roles in Monterey, D.C. and Bread Loaf.

These staff have weathered Covid–19 or adapted in its wake; they wake up early or stay late to make up the differences across time zones. They love Middlebury, and most of all, its students.

Angie Quesenberry has worked for the Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIS) for the past 22 years as assistant to the deans of the graduate school. She handles administrative tasks to track degree progress, manage timesheets and create opportunities for graduate students, while also tackling anybody's problem that might come up, big or small.

"That's always been my policy: come by my desk to get your problem solved, or at least get pointed in the right direction," Quesenberry said.

She fixes problems wherever they run into her; the day before, after encountering a student dealing with an early morning chill, Quesenberry ran to her car to grab a blanket and warmed her up.

"It's the little things that matter," Quesenberry explained.

Though her job has evolved over the years — the Institute has consolidated from four dean's assistants to just one in her time there — Quesenberry loves taking on new projects and adding things to her to-do list, especially when they involve interacting across campuses.

"I like being able to talk to people, rather than emailing. I think that connection is really important," Quesenberry said.

Another long-time employee of MIIS is Molly Laughlin, advancement operations and stewardship officer, who has worked in her current position for 11 years. Collaborating closely with a few others in a small office, she writes reports for donors who have contributed to named scholarships and immersive learning opportunities for students. Yet her path to MIIS was not a typical one.

"I landed in this job quite by happen-stance," Laughlin explained, adding that she previously received her master's in medical journalism and worked for two nearby cities before starting in advancement.

A San Francisco native, Laughlin has now lived in Monterey since 1993 and knows its history like the back of her hand — easily rattling

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College holds events, provides glasses for total solar eclipse on April 8

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A home in New York, a job in Vermont

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Persistent lack of childcare affects college staff

By MANDY BERGHELA and EMILY HOGAN

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Rumi and Ramadan

By ZAHRA MOEINI MEYBODI

We can't live without our staff. So why doesn't Middlebury pay them a livable wage?

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

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Staff's defining pop culture memories

By JACK TORPEY

The staff who review the New England Review

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MULTIMEDIA

Into the Archives: the staff at the heart of Middlebury Special Collections

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How staff across the country help run Middlebury

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off facts about colonial California and John Steinbeck, who wrote his acclaimed novel "The Pearl" at 460 Pierce Street, the official address of the Institute.

She highlighted both the local history and diverse range of languages heard around campus as what make Monterey a unique place. "You can walk from your office to the parking lot and hear four or five different languages being spoken by students and faculty."

Three hours ahead and near three thousand miles away from Monterey is Middlebury in D.C. It hosts the Washington office for the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) where Ian Stewart has worked as the executive director since 2020, when he arrived across the pond from King's College London.

Stewart has worked on international security issues including sanctions, export controls and weapons acquisitions by Iran, China, North Korea and other states. He is also studying topics frequently in the news these days: the war in Ukraine and artificial intelligence.

"We certainly do pivot depending on world events, so after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, I personally wanted to be working on that topic because it's such an egregious issue," he explained.

In addition to his international travels — just last week Stewart was at the CNS office in Vienna, Austria — he will be trekking to Vermont later this month to conduct aresearch experiment with Open.
AI and Middlebury students to understand if A.I. is capable of building real objects.

"Could you use ChatGPT to build a bioweapon? Or build a bomb?" he posited, hoping that students working with 3D printers in the Makerspace will help them answer such questions raised by the rise of A.I. Such exchanges with undergraduates, in addition to the interns hosted in D.C. every J-Term and summer, are an important part of Middlebury in D.C.'s contribution to the college experience.

That sentiment is shared across the D.C office, where Director of the Middle East Nonproliferation Program Chen Zak Kane has worked for 14 years. In that time she successfully petitioned for the creation of her department and now conducts research into China's role in the Middle East, among other topics, which has shifted in recent months because of the turbulent events of the region this past year.

"All those things happening while we are trying to implement the project, which make it much more interesting. Things in real life are actually influencing our policy findings and recommendations," Kane said.

One of her favorite parts of the work is mentoring young people on the ground through the Middle East Next Generation Arms Control Network, which aims to build regional dialogue.

"I think they are the future of the region, they are the ones who give me hope that there is hope in the region for a better future," she added.

Across these campuses are also more recent staff additions to the Middlebury umbrella. Sasha Kingsley, director of student life and engagement in Monterey, has worked at MIIS for about a year, and manages programming, campus-wide events and other support for her students.

"I wear a lot of hats," Kingsley said. Recent and upcoming initiatives she worked on have been a Lunar New Year celebration, finals week de-stressors featuring therapy dogs and a sanctuary spa and reforming the student council to be more representative of the students.

"I've always loved being surrounded by students, especially international students," Kingsley said. "MIIS is different than any other institution I've worked at."

Kahar McCullum, a circulation specialist in Monterey's library, has only worked at the Institute for three months, but he has already found himself busy with managing graduate student employees, updating the library's emergency and disaster planning, and curating Monterey's collection.

"The MIIS community here is really welcoming and they really try to get to know you," McCullum said, adding that he enjoys the opportunity to learn from his colleagues as well as a wide array of students specializing in their fields. "They're definitely teaching me a lot. And I hope that I'm doing the same for them."

Nearby in the Monterey Library you can also find Joelle Mellon, a research and instruction librarian of almost five years. Her most innovative contribution to MIIS may also be the most unexpected one: gaming.

"I just love games. I love having them around, I love having people playing them in the library," Mellon said, adding that the interest in games as a social activity and tool for educational instruction has grown over time at Monterey. "That's been the thing that I brought to this position that they didn't know they ever needed."

In addition to other specialty and themed games available in Monterey, another favorite of hers, Dungeons & Dragons, can be a powerful tool for teaching students to collaborate and problem-solve.

"This is the best team building exercise you could ever, ever do," she explained, remarking on the close communities gaming has built at the Institute. "Your character will literally die if you can't work together in [Dungeons & Dragons]."

Mellon has something in common with Quesenberry besides gorgeous California skies: both received the 2023 Above and Beyond Award, which recognizes the unique contributions and dedication of four staff members at the Institute each year.

The winners shared their appreciation for the nominations and recognition as pillars of the MIIS community.

"It's just awesome. It tells me that how I do my job doesn't go unnoticed here," Quesenberry said, now a three-time recipient of the award.

While Mellon is indisputably the master of games in Monterey, across the country is another community built on stories: The Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Jennifer Grotz joined Bread Loaf as a young writer years ago, and started working there in 2005 before being chosen as director of the conference.

Right now, Grotz is involved in reading over 3,000 applications for this summer's conference, in addition to overseeing budgets, inviting faculty, planning workshops and lectures. Bread Loaf is rooted in a strong tradition of past writers for almost a hundred years of innovative contributions to literature.

"It's where our notion of creative writing and the creative writing workshop began," Grotz explained. "Now, it feels very commonplace, but it was quite a radical contribution to American letters, for better or worse."

All these years spent writing and working at Bread Loaf have not diminished its beauty and creative capacity for Grotz.

"I find that when I come down from the mountain. I've got enough ideas to last me for the year," she added. "There's something about sort of retreat into a beautiful natural space where we're a temporary idyllic community of writers trapped on a mountain, that gives an intensity to the experience."

Gail Borden has worked for a year as the administrative associate & Oxford campus coordinator for the separate Bread Loaf School of English, having originally been hired to help with re-accreditation in 2010. Borden shared in an email to The Campus that her favorite part of the job is when all of the students, faculty and staff (including her office) arrive at the school's campuses — in Ripton, Monterey, and Oxford, U.K. — in June.

"It is wonderful to see the things we have been doing all year come to fruition. Everyone is happy to be starting, or back, on campus," Borden wrote. "Our campuses are beautiful, all in their different ways."

Borden works closely with a variety of college departments from her office on Franklin Street, and helps prepare course registration, funding and special events for the summer through her spreadsheets and data platforms.

"I really enjoy collaborating with my colleagues to figure out the best way to do all the things we need to do," Borden said.

Whether they commute past the U.S. Capitol, spend summers at Bread Loaf or surf on Monterey's beaches after work, Middlebury employees across the country are intimately connected to the daily lives of students, faculty and administrators — and they would not have it any other way.

"There's never a dull moment here," Quesenberry said. "Thank goodness!"

Understaffing challenges

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been difficult," the employee said, noting that they work between four to four-and-a-half hours of overtime each week. "I'm supposed to get done at 9:30 p.m., but many times I only get out of here at 10:00 or 10:30."

Detora added that to tackle some of these issues from the fall, the team decided to adjust Ross Dining Hall's menu and hours of service, which Detora said helped alleviate some challenges for staff.

"We changed in J-Term because we were having difficulties with equipment and getting our employees proper breaks," Detora explained.

In Davis Family Library, four librarians left their jobs in a four month period last spring, leaving the library low on staff members. Staff turnover is still an ongoing issue at Davis, according to Terry Simpkins, director of discovery and access services and the representative for the library on Staff Council.

"We have a couple of imminent retirements coming… and by the time we fill those positions and the newest folks start working here, we will have turned over about 1/3 of our entire library staff," Simpkins wrote in an email to The Campus.

This flurry of change comes after many years of relative staffing stability in the library. The recent turnover is largely tied to budget cuts and the implementation of the 'skill matrix' staff compensation system in July 2022, about which staff members have mixed feelings, Simpkins said.

"Librarians who left and remained in academic librarianship easily found better paying jobs within the New England region. Even those staff who changed careers — and two of our former librarians left both academia and libraries entirely — told me directly prior to their leaving that the college's seemingly forever-austerity-mode regarding budgets simply wore them out," Simpkins wrote.

Although the dining hall is better staffed than it has been previously, according to Detora, a clashing of schedules still leads to some challenges during certain times of day.

"In fact, there is often overstaffing on mid-week evening shifts, when students are most willing to work," wrote Chris Frago '24, a part-time student cook at Ross in an email to The Campus. "Yet, on Saturday night, when Atwater is closed and Ross is busiest, few, if any, student workers will take the shift."

Frago added that the all-day, pub food model introduced last fall created new challenges for dining hall employees.

"Staying open all day uninterrupted took the chefs' precious attention away from prep work, which is the foundation of every great meal at Ross," Frago wrote. "Having even an hour to reset and cook rather than serve food makes all the difference, and lets chefs create bolder and better meals."

Ross changed its hours and moved away from continuous dining at the beginning of J-Term in order to remedy some of the issues caused by serving food all day.

Even amid some improvements from the recent change in hours, dining hall employees stressed the importance of expanding the number of roles in the dining halls and hiring more employees, explaining that student rush times can sometimes overwhelm even a full shift of workers.

A dining room attendant at Ross who asked to remain anonymous spoke about the ways these issues can lead to staff turnover.

"We only have one or two people at a station that requires like four people, like the dishroom for example. So, those people get overloaded with work and they get frustrated, so they leave," the employee said. "I think if we just had more open positions available, you're then not relying on a few people to do a job that requires more people."

The dining attendant also expressed frustration that the responsibilities of dining workers have grown with the return of 10 o'clock Ross, despite not having received any new staff members to work the extended hours.

While understaffing is the cause of many of these issues, student behavior has also frustrated several dining hall employees. Dining Services receives a garbage bag full of dishes every week from facilities that students have thrown away in trash cans. These dishes must be sorted from the trash by facilities and subsequently washed by dining hall employees, according to one anonymous source who works in the dining halls.

Detora added that the difficulty of finding housing in Addison County results in a smaller applicant pool. Staff members in Dining Services agreed, citing their personal experiences with finding affordable places to live in the local area.

"I still live at home with my mom, and I've looked around for apartments… it's just not affordable," the dining hall attendant said.

Simpkins wrote that library staff frustrations around wages and the college's budgeting has led to more staff turnover. A reference librarian position was removed entirely without prior notice during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Simpkins. Additionally, he said the college's digital collections budget has not kept pace with inflation, leading to staff dissatisfaction.

While the budget cuts alone frustrated some staff enough to leave the college, the hard cap on salaries in the skill matrix compensation system also led to staff dissatisfaction in the library in particular, according to Simpkins.

"I have personally witnessed how it saps morale like crazy and how it effectively penalizes current long-serving staff… it also undermines the new system of skill matrix promotions and annual market reviews by nullifying what should be a substantial salary increase," Simpkins wrote. "It's frankly a terrible feature of the current compensation system, especially when it affects staff in lower graded positions."

Tim Parsons, the college's landscape horticulturist, also discussed the compensation system and the lack of salary adjustments for cost-of-living increases in the area. Adjustments to staff salary pay grades are given according to market research on salaries at peer institutions based on an aggregate of factors, including cost-of-living, but there is no specific cost-of-living increase to wages.

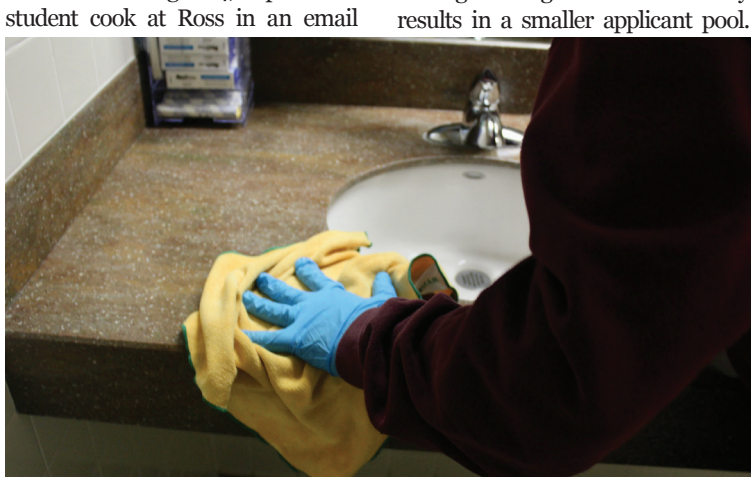
Wages for staff have not kept pace with inflation since the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the Middlebury Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The current minimum wage at the college is $17.60 per hour, while a livable wage for a single adult with no children in Addison County is $23.33 per hour, according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator.

"Are we always going to be playing catchup?" Parsons asked.

Frago wrote optimistically about his experience working in the kitchen this year and stressed the importance of the student body understanding the staff's perspective.

"Many employees were once in college themselves, and have experienced dining as a student. They know that not everyone will like everything at each meal, but they take pride in their work and do far more than they are given credit for," Frago said.

Simpkins stressed the work staff members do to keep the college functioning every day, forced to pick up extra slack when departments are understaffed. "Staff keep this place running, and it feels like we bear most of the burden for balancing the budget," Simpkins wrote.



ANNALISE JOHNSON/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

A Facilities Services staff member cleans a bathroom in Forest.

The woman who revolutionized the dining hall experience

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Swan's biggest hit to date is trivia, which she now does every Sunday between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

"It gives them something to look forward to on Sundays," Swan said. "I think it makes everybody closer. Because they're all trying to get the answers and everybody's trying to work together."

She looks up the questions ahead of time, which range from the first toy invented (a stick) to "In 1835, Richard Lawrence made the first attempt to assassinate a U.S. President but misfired. Who was the president? (Andrew Jackson)."

Those who bear witness to trivia will notice that in silent moments, Swan calls out specific students. Shane Farrell '24.5 is one of those special shoutouts.

"I'm not really good at trivia but I guess because we're friends whenever no one answers I'm the scapegoat and I'll answer for her even if it's wrong," he said.

Farrell added that he has long been friendly with Swan, and appreciates that she always offers a warm hug.

"She's honestly the sweetest human ever. So positive, so nice and super comforting as well," Farrell said.

On Easter Sunday, Swan had the idea for an easter egg hunt. Executive Director of Food Service Operations Dan Detora agreed to offer a $25 declining balance gift card as the prize. But Swan's hiding place of a lamp shade was seemingly too good, as none of the 15 students who showed up for the 7 a.m. event found it. So, she asked a final trivia question: What is the most popular french toast bake? The answer: caramel chocolate swirl. Swan also hosted a game of musical chairs, and offered bags of candy to students throughout the day.

Swan was beaming about the event for the rest of the day, telling students about her hiding spots and encouraging them to take candy. She said she was proud of the event, but is already thinking of improvements for next year.

Sometimes, though, Swan's announcements are a bit less positive. She has used the microphone to remind students not to take their anger out on her for forgetting their ID card to get into the dining hall and to remember to exit by the dishes. When students exit at the entrance that Swan sits at, she told students in the dining hall, she often gets bumped into and injured.

"Come to me. I'm very easy to get along with," Swan said in an interview with The Campus. "But if you're sneaking in, it's not so good."

In another instance, she recalled a student calling her a jerk, and saying that it was her fault he would starve. Her coworker had to step in and reiterate that Swan was just doing her job, and that he had to leave.

"I felt bad that he had to leave because he's probably hungry, but talk to me nice. I would have let him in, honestly. I'm not gonna make somebody starve. But you can't treat people that way and expect to get in."

Swan has long had a caring spirit. She was a nurse at Porter Hospital for 25 years, where she worked in the nursing home department for patients with dementia. Swan said the work, which was already challenging, became even too difficult when she lost both of her parents at the same time.

"I'd get too close and then I would lose somebody. It just got too much," she said.

Middlebury is glad to have a creative, dedicated spirit like Swan. Her warm voice and cheery smile, and of course, her famous hugs, make the warm Proctor booths even cozier.

COLLEGE HOLDS EVENTS, PROVIDES GLASSES FOR TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE ON APRIL 8

By ELLIE TRINKLE
News Editor

For the first time since 1932, Middlebury will be in the path of totality for a solar eclipse. Starting at 2:14 p.m. on Monday April 8, the moon's shadow will slowly move until it fully covers the sun, which will occur at 3:27 p.m.

The next time Vermont will have a total solar eclipse is in 2079, and Middlebury will not be in the path of totality, making this event unique for the college.

The college published a web page featuring a schedule of all the various on-campus events that will take place surrounding the eclipse — open to staff, faculty and students — as well as general eclipse information and safety precautions.

A lecture series of professors in the Physics and Anthropology departments has run during the week of April 1, the week leading up to the eclipse on April 8. The Middlebury College Activities Board (MCAB) is also hosting events for students.

Observatory Specialist Dr. Catherine Miller assisted with purchasing glasses that will allow people to safely view the eclipse without damaging their eyes. Half of the glasses were paid for by an anonymous donor, for which Miller expressed appreciation.

Miller plans to have plenty of opportunities for the community to get a pair of glasses before eclipse day. There will also be glasses distributed day-of at the viewing event on Battell Beach. The times and locations for glasses distribution are still being finalized, but will be made available on the eclipse web page.

"Viewing the Solar Eclipse requires specialized glasses, which are made to a particular international standard of transmittance, so just making sure that they block the appropriate amounts of both visible and UV light," Miller said.

She also recommends to never look directly into the sun or use a phone to take a picture of the eclipse. Remembering to look down at the ground before putting on and removing the glasses is another way to ensure eye safety during the event.

Miller also helped to organize the lecture series. The lectures will explore the historical, social and cultural aspects of eclipses. Miller has been working alongside Associate Director of Community Relations Amy Carlin since November to organize the series along with a stargazing event at the Mittleman Observatory on April 5.

Frank Winkler Professor of Astrophysics Eilat Glikman commended Miller's dedication to organizing these events and shared her excitement to participate in the lecture series. Glikman hosted a lecture on April 3 titled "The Physics and Societal Impact of Solar Eclipses," where she discussed the importance of eclipses, and more generally, astronomy.

"Astronomy, I think more than so many sciences, really does tie into our human experience in a way that is highly impractical… there's no technology… it's just wonder, it's just delight. It just fulfills our purpose. It's like listening to a poem that nature writes," Glikman said.

MCAB is hosting bracelet, cookie and lantern making, and a movie night and post-eclipse trivia where students can win declining balance. MCAB hopes that these different events will help students learn about and engage in conversations about the eclipse, as well as bring the community together.

"These school events will be a great opportunity for people to meet new people and gather with friends and do something creative, outside of the academic hustle," said MCAB social executive board member Kanon Asari '27.

Asari and her fellow committee members worked with Carlin to organize their events. The MCAB general board assisted with brainstorming some event concepts, and once finalized all of the necessary materials were ordered. The committee aimed to connect all the details of event design back to the eclipse.

Celestial beads will be available for bracelet making, cookies will be designed to look like suns and moons, and the movie they are showing is "Guardians of the Galaxy."

On the actual eclipse day, there will be 60 seconds of totality over Battell Beach. After that the moon will slowly uncover the sun, eventually disappearing around 4:37 p.m. An email sent out to the college on March 26 stated that release time from 2–4:30 p.m. has been approved, meaning that college staff can ask their managers to participate in the viewing.

While the college has not formally asked professors to cancel classes, they recommended faculty offer flexibility for students to view the eclipse. Many professors have taken the initiative to cancel their classes on April 8.

Both Glikman and Miller agreed with the sentiment, sharing that if they had classes during eclipse time, they would cancel them.

"Look, we are a liberal arts campus," Glikman said. "I can't think of a more interdisciplinary and sort of liberal phenomenon, that we can all come together and really be part of nature. And for a campus that is so committed to environmental studies, I feel like again, it's right there. It's an experience."

Asari said that her class, "Society and The Individual," taught by Associate Professor of Sociology Jamie McCallum was canceled and that McCallum even mentioned possibly inviting his students to his house for a class-wide viewing party.

Isabel Thomas '26.5 is in "Economic Statistics," taught by Erick Gong, associate professor of economics, who also decided to cancel class for the eclipse.

"He's canceling class on April 8 and told us to get out and enjoy the once in a lifetime experience of viewing the eclipse, and thought that was more educational than econ stats would be that day," Thomas said.

As eclipse day approaches, it is important to review safety precautions.

"While the risk may be minimized during the moment of totality, that moment is subjective and permanent damage can occur just before or after totality. Peeking for a few seconds, wearing sunglasses, or squinting will not protect your eyes," the college's webpage advises.

Those who have planned the events around the eclipse encourage students to attend events and — most importantly — view the eclipse on April 8.

"I think it's just really exciting that we get togetwher as a community and experience it together," Miller said. "We don't know how we're going to feel when it happens, but I've heard that people might feel awe, some people go quiet, some people start crying, some people start screaming. It's going to be really cool."

After nearly two years, staff still give mixed reviews on 'skill matrix' compensation system

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market range.

Terry Simpkins, director of discovery and access services in the library, and the chair of the Staff Council Compensation and Benefits Subcommittee, described parts of the system that are still unclear to staff.

"It still feels like there is a fair amount to the process that is a little opaque to staff," Simpkins said.

The Compensation and Benefits Subcommittee sent a series of questions and recommendations to Human Resources in March. This submission to Human Resources inquired about how the targets for the number of staff who can move up on the skill matrix in any given year are determined, how the annual market raises are determined, how positions are placed in pay grades and how budget dollars for unfilled positions are used.

The college does a reassessment in January or February to determine if the overall market rate shifted over the past year, according to Goss. Last year, the aggregate assessment of inflation, cost of living and other indicators at peer institutions resulted in a 3.5% increase in staff salary ranges across the board.

"Our goal is through this program to capture all of those shifts in that market," Goss said.

Norden described the uncertainty as to whether the market reassessment would result in an across-the-board salary increase for staff any given year as a challenge with the system.

"We shifted systems to a more unpredictable system so that we could benefit from it. Not so that we could suffer from it," Norden said. "The reality is uncertainty is hard for people."

If the market analysis does not result in an across-the-board increase in a year, staff members' only hopes for a raise are by moving up the skill matrix or receiving a discretionary payment – but both of these can be difficult to come by, according to staff who spoke with The Campus.

Simpkins said one of his primary issues with the current compensation system is when employees are placed in too low of a salary band based on Human Resources' interpretation of their job description.

"It feels as though if I hit the right combination of magic words in the job description, then maybe it gets bumped up," he explained. "And if I don't, out of luck."

Supervisors are asked yearly to write an eight bullet point job description for each position in their department. These job descriptions are then used to benchmark the salary grade based on comparable positions at peer institutions.

One anonymous staff member described the challenge of accurately fitting all aspects of a person's job responsibilities into an eight bullet point description, especially for staff who have had to pick up extra work since the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to Ellen Usilton, assistant vice president, human resources and people operations, the idea of the eight-point job descriptions is to focus on the most critical aspects of the position.

"Folks are pretty creative with those eight bullet points," Usilton told The Campus.

Supervisors can submit a market verification to have Human Resources revisit the benchmarking of a specific position within the market. Last year, supervisors submitted 41 market verifications and 10 changes to salary grades for specific positions were approved, according to a May 2023 staff compensation update released by Human Resources.

Simpkins also cited concerns with the hard caps for employees who have reached the top end of their salary band. These hard caps often impact staff who have been at the college for a number of years, and can be extremely damaging to morale, he said.

Tim Parsons, landscape horticulturist and a member of the Staff Resources Committee, spoke similarly of the issues with the hard cap.

"It certainly is a sore spot," Parsons said. "If you get to the top of your range, if you've been here a long time, you will only get a market raise each year. You are capped out."

According to Goss and Usilton, however, the college must work within its financial means to balance prioritizing wages for its lowest paid employees and for employees at the higher end of their salary range. "At the end of the day, we have budgets and things that we have to meet, so all of those things have to come together at some point," Goss said.

The college ran an $8.2 million deficit in fiscal year 2023, and is projected to run an $8.4 million deficit in fiscal year 2024. While the endowment draw has stayed consistently at five percent over the past three years, the amount of money directed to staff salaries increased by $3.1 million from fiscal year 2023 to fiscal year 2024.

Parsons described pressures on President Laurie Patton's administration to shrink the deficit and grow the endowment after years of high spending and a high draw on the endowment under the past administration. Under previous president Ronald Liebowitz (2004–2015), in 2015 the college had an operating loss of 13.4% and drew eight percent from the endowment, compared to an operating loss of 2.4% in 2023, according to financial highlights presented to Staff Council in December 2023.

With the hard caps and disagreement over the salary bands in which some positions were placed, Simpkins described feelings among staff that the college is trying to push out higher-paid, longer-serving staff to achieve savings.

"I have talked to staff who feel as though the college is sort of balancing the books on the backs of staff," he said. "And that doesn't feel great."

According to Goss and Usilton, the skill matrix system is meant to give more discretion to supervisors, who interact with their employees frequently and know their employees' work well, in determining compensation. Supervisors make preliminary decisions as to which of their employees will receive a skill matrix bump or discretionary money, and those decisions are then approved by the vice presidents for each department.

Twelve percent of Middlebury employees moved up in the skill matrix system during fiscal year 2023, according to the May 2023 compensation update.

The intention, Goss said, is that supervisors have a thorough understanding of the skill matrix system and its application through meetings of the Leadership Alliance and Skill Matrix Workshops, and they are equipped to apply the system properly in their respective departments.

According to the anonymous staff member, however, having a supervisor who is not tuned in to the functioning of the skill matrix system seriously impacts an employee's prospects for progression at Middlebury.

"If you are someone who is stuck with a manager who doesn't manage, you're stuck. And that will directly impact your potential, your career trajectory," the staff member said. "The system is only as good as the people who are responsible for executing it."

Norden described one benefit of the skill matrix system being the way it can be adjusted in its application for different positions across different areas of the college. At the same time, she said, this can make it challenging for the skill matrix to be applied evenly across departments, and for employees to see a clear trajectory of career progression at the college.

"There's not really career development, per se," Norden added. "Depending on the position, you may have to either move to another employer, or another institution that is larger."

Goss cited the four steps in the skill matrix as representing the arc of an employee's career at Middlebury. Staff can also move into a different role and then progress through the skill matrix in that new role, she explained.

"We have seen lots of examples of people being able to move around and opportunistically look for that," Goss said.

Norden called for more of a focus on career development, workshops and trainings for Middlebury employees. It can be difficult for staff to take on such continuing education on top of their heavy workload, Norden said, but she described it as a way for people to progress in their careers when there is only so much that can be done for compensation with limited budget dollars.

Career development opportunities at Middlebury include the staff development fund, which helps fund courses, workshops or training programs directly related to an employee's position at the college, and the continuing education fund, which allows staff to study at any accredited program or university related or unrelated to their current field of employment.

Despite concerns with job benchmarking to salary grades, hard caps and the opportunity for career progression, staff spoke highly of Human Resources' willingness to discuss compensation with staff and the benefits package which Middlebury provides its employees.

Jared Rawson, a team liaison for custodial and support services and a representative on Staff Council, described the college's efforts to put its best foot forward and listen to staff voices, amidst the financial constraints it faces as an institution.

"There is a positive changing of the mindset of whether or not you can reach out and tell somebody and know it's not going to come back on you negatively," Rawson told The Campus.

There is no perfect compensation system, but coming from previously being employed in the real world, Middlebury is a good place to work with its benefits, the flexibility it provides families and its opportunities for improvement, Jim Zieger, an HVAC mechanic and Staff Council representative, said.

"They have the best of intentions. They are struggling against a small deficit and trying to figure out how do they balance the scales, but I do think they are making huge efforts and I have to commend them for that," Zieger added.

Simpkins described the conversations that must be ongoing between staff and Human Resources to ensure that college employees are supported and sufficiently compensated.

"We love the place. I have nothing but the greatest respect for the students and faculty and my co-workers," Simpkins said. "We just want to make sure the place stays at the level I remember it being. I believe [Human Resources] has the same philosophy. We need to come together and listen to the two perspectives."

First units of new Middlebury affordable housing development expected to alleviate housing burden for staff

By BEN WAGNER
Local Editor

A new affordable housing project in Middlebury, planned as a collaboration between the college, Summit Properties and the town of Middlebury, is set to see its first units go on sale in May 2025.

Upon completion, the development, located on Seminary Street Extension, will have approximately 200 units, divided into three categories of equal size: affordable housing, the "missing middle" — people with a household income between $60,000 and $120,000 — and market-rate individual townhouses.

The affordable housing units will be rental housing for households with yearly incomes of less than $50,000. The "missing middle" will be made up of townhouses, duplexes and triplexes. Many Middlebury staff are a part of that income bracket, so this affordable housing is a huge opportunity, according to David Provost, executive vice president of finance and administration.

State and federal funding will cover $180,000 of the approximate $500,000 construction cost for each unit, according to Provost, who noted that high construction financial borrowing costs are among its biggest challenges.

Colleen Norden, systems & communications specialist in the CTLR and president of Staff Council expressed staff support and excitement about the project.

"A new mixed use, affordable housing development project has been sorely needed for decades in Middlebury. Staff truly welcome this project," Norden wrote in an email to The Campus.

Norden added that as a result of a lack of affordable housing in the area, many staff members are forced to live further away from campus, facing longer commute times and other costs such as car wear-and-tear.

"These issues can impact if an employee chooses to start working or continues working at Middlebury," Norden wrote. She added that this contributes to low application numbers for staff positions as well as some rejected offers.

According to data the college's human resources department emailed to The Campus, only 39.9% of staff members live within the town of Middlebury's limits, and 21.7% of staff members live farther than 15 miles away from the town.

Norden also noted that the new housing development could have positive impacts far beyond benefitting the occupants of units themselves. She expressed hope that it could lead to lower or slower rental price increases and improved overall housing conditions in Middlebury. She explained that tenants often fear complaining about living situations because they have a lack of options and landlord references are needed for long-term rentals.

Many towns also offer few protections for renters, but increasing supply might increase average housing quality, added Norden.

"Middlebury and its surrounding towns do not have a mandatory rental inspection program like the ones existing in Burlington or Rutland putting the complaint burden on renters. Decreasing the local occupancy rate may encourage improvement of rental stock either through more time between turnovers or renter pressure," Norden wrote.

The college purchased the 35-acre parcel of land in April 2022 for $1.5 million. Now, it has a less of a direct role than it does in on-campus construction projects, where the facilities team manages the project directly.

"We go to all [Development Review Board] meetings to show support of the project but it's really Summit as the Developer that takes the lead," Provost said.

The development will occur in several phases, according to Provost. The first phase, which must be completed prior to the first round of unit construction, is basic site infrastructure, such as the stormwater and sewer system.

The college is working on establishing an agreement with a subcontractor in Vermont who would prefabricate at least some of the units in their factory, and ship the pieces to the site on tractor-trailers, but the agreement has yet to be finalized.

"Building in Vermont is a pain in the ass because one day it's 10 below and the next day it's hot so when you're dealing with materials, it's really tough to get consistency. But in the control environment of a factory, you can," Provost said of the potential benefits of constructing using prefabricated pieces.

The housing development's occupants will not be restricted to college faculty and staff, and many other local businesses and other employees are expected to benefit.

"[The project] will eventually benefit not only staff, but all employees of the college or local community who are seeking housing," Norden wrote.

Provost reiterated that the college recognizes that this project is community-focused and will also benefit local businesses and Porter Hospital. However, he did note that as the community's largest employer, he expects the college will have the highest percentage of employees living in the development, and that the development will first be marketed to college employees before expanding to the wider community.

Provost believes that the state as a whole is going to see a period of quick housing growth.

"I think the last 20 years, 30 years we were in hold of, 'Let's keep people from ever coming to Vermont, we're gonna control that with our zoning rules and in our permit process to make it really difficult to build here'... Now we don't have places for people to live, so we have to build," Provost said.

Provost explained that while staff have not been involved in plans for the new housing up to this point, he hopes to involve them as the project gets closer to fruition.

Norden expressed her hopes for more Staff Council involvement in the future.

"Questions we hope to follow up on include — what strategies will be in place to ensure continued housing affordability for staff members, how will staff members be involved in the ongoing planning and development process, and what mechanisms will be in place for collecting feedback, addressing concerns, and making adjustments based on staff input?" Norden wrote.

Provost reiterated his view of the college's role in helping develop the Middlebury and Addison County communities along with college employees.

"I'm a big believer that large employers have to be at the table to solve economic factors," Provost said.

LOCAL CONSTRUCTION COMPANY REACHES MAJOR MILESTONE FOR NEW FIRST YEAR RESIDENCE HALL

By JULIA PEPPER
Senior Local Editor

As college students start to roll out of bed and slowly trickle into morning classes, contractors from the local community are already hard at work on campus building the future of the college. Every Monday to Friday from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., around 75 employees from Naylor & Breen, a construction company based in Brandon, Vt., are at work on campus constructing the new residence hall on Battell Beach.

Members of the Student Life and Facilities teams officially broke ground on the dorm on June 26 last year, and the project's completion is scheduled for spring 2025. The final dorm will be over 87,000 square feet, and house 40% of the freshman class with 298 beds. The residence hall has recently reached its "dry-in" phase, meaning the roof and exterior elements have been completed, so that weather-sensitive construction can begin on the inside.

The new residence hall is one of the largest construction projects Naylor & Breen has worked on for Middlebury College.

"For the geographic area that [Naylor & Breen] services this is a large project both with respect to physical size and value," wrote Tanner Romano, the current owner of Naylor & Breen, in an email to The Campus. "There aren't a lot of projects this size that are built in Vermont outside of Chittenden County."

The new residence hall is only one of a myriad of projects the company has completed for the college. The first Naylor & Breen project was the renovation of the Bread Loaf Inn, completed in the mid-2010s. The company has also renovated Warner Hall, Dana Auditorium, the Adirondack House, the Prism Center for Queer and Trans Life, the 75 Shannon Street building and the Johnson Memorial Building.

"At Bread Loaf and on main campus, they have completed renovations of numerous small house student residence and have completed countless lesser scale maintenance and improvement projects," wrote Norm Cushman, associate vice president for operations, in an email to The Campus.

Along with Mike Moser, director of Facility Services, Cushman works with nearly all levels of Naylor & Breen, including Romano and other supervisors and staff directly.

"Mike Moser and I are involved in all phases of a project of this magnitude," Cushman wrote. "This includes planning, Trustee discussions, meetings with the architects, engineers and other consultants, and with prospective contractors. Once the project is designed, funded, and awarded to a contractor, Mike and I are actively engaged in all aspects of construction."

Almost all of the current Naylor & Breen employees have worked on Middlebury College projects before. There are different groups for each trade needed for the building, and sometimes multiple groups working on different pieces of the same trade.

Naylor & Breen fabricates their own copper and has groups of ironworkers, masons and pipefitters who connect steam pipes to other dorms, among other specialties. Now that the "dry-in" phase is complete, the mason workers, who work on concrete blocks needed to construct walls and walkways throughout the building, are able to begin working, according to Naylor & Breen Project Superintendent John Drinwater.

Drinwater has worked on numerous projects at the college, including many of the aforementioned building and renovation works.

Drinwater is on site every workday and recently organized a cookout celebration to celebrate reaching the "dry-in" phase, which he described as a huge milestone for the team. He emphasized the long-standing collaboration and positive relationship between the construction group and the college, a sentiment echoed by Romano.

"We have been working collaboratively with Middlebury College for around a decade on various projects both large and small and have found the entire team at [the college] to be honest, transparent and truly collaborative," Romano wrote. "They take the time to listen to the folks performing the trades and sincerely value our opinions. This creates a true 'teamwork' approach to the projects and helps everyone involved become invested in the project's success."

JULIA PEPPER/THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS
The college is collaborating with longstanding partner Naylor & Breen Construction on the new first-year dorm, set to be finished in 2025.

Despite being based in Brandon, Naylor & Breen is currently working on several other projects in Addison County.

"We hope to work on many more [Middlebury College] projects," Romano added. "There is a great team at [Middlebury] that is excellent to collaborate with for projects such as this."

When the first crop of first years moves into the new dorm, instead of beloved old Battell Hall, a Middlebury rite of passage may be lost. But those future scholars will gain access to an incredible new facility, thanks to the work of Naylor & Breen employees and Middlebury College staff.

A HOME IN NEW YORK, A JOB IN VERMONT

By KATRINA SCHWARZ
Local Editor

Vermont's high costs of leading lead many employees to make long commutes to work, often from New York State. Only 39.5% of staff members live within the town of Middlebury, according to data the college Human Resources department sent to The Campus. The same data highlights that 21.7% of staff live further than 15 miles from campus.

Jeremy Keach, a supervisor at Atwater Dining Hall, has faced the challenges posed by traveling daily across state lines. He began working for Middlebury College in October 2023, and currently lives in the town of Port Henry, N.Y., alongside the New York border with Vermont. He typically reaches the college in thirty minutes, but his commute times increase if he faces inclement weather such as snow on the drive.

Living in the Middlebury area is not an option for him, despite holding a supervisory position.

"Even making the money that Middlebury pays, Middlebury itself and just Vermont is ridiculous," Keach said. He hopes to soon purchase his dream home, which would most likely be located in New York.

Keach enjoys his work at Middlebury, noting, "The culture here is way better than at a normal restaurant. Even though we are twice as busy, there is no animosity, everyone works together, and it's really fun."

Keach is not the only Middlebury staff member who faces the issue of not being able to find affordable housing in Vermont. John Rao, a support services technician, also calls New York home. He has been working for Middlebury for four years, and highlighted the benefits that a Middlebury employee receives. After years of being a farmer, he likes the stability of a salaried, fair-paid job.

Rao's commute to work is forty-five minutes to an hour from his residence in New York, where he owns sixty-five acres of property and likes to spend his time outside.

"I was looking for a place, and in Vermont, you can afford the house, but then you can't afford the taxes. So then, we decided to look in New York and it was a little bittersweet because I had been in Vermont my whole life," Rao said.

Not everybody who commutes to and from New York has a similar experience, however. Dan Detora, executive director of food service operations, rents a room on the outskirts of Middlebury in order to mitigate his commute.

Detora has worked for the college for almost ten years and lives near Saratoga Springs, N.Y., about a two hour drive away, with his wife. He too has felt the impact of rising housing expenses, although his situation differs from that of employees in roles with lower rates of compensation.

"When I first arrived, I lived in a one-bedroom apartment, but it became too expensive, so I had to move into my current location which is basically a bedroom and bathroom in a house with others," Detora said.

Detora believes that Middlebury College offers competitive pay, especially after changing its compensation structure.

The results of a 2022 Middlebury-commissioned Mercer study indicated that the college was undercompensating staff in comparison to other liberal arts colleges. Since the implementation of the skill matrix compensation system in July 2022, the college has benchmarked employees' wages to pay at a group of peer institutions, which include Roger Williams University and Suffolk University..

The college commissions the Mercer consulting firm every few years to survey wages and salaries across all departments. Middlebury College defines "competitive wages" as within 15% of the market median.

After undergoing these structural changes, and raising the minimum wage at the college to $17.60 per hour, compensation at Middlebury has become more competitive. Given the MIT Living Wage Calculator's metric that a livable wage for a single adult with no children is $23.33 per hour, compensation still fails to cover the cost of living in Addison County for many.

Detora is hopeful that the affordable housing construction going up in Middlebury will help to relieve this issue, as many of the dining hall staff cannot currently afford housing in the area.

"I think this will be a huge win for the college and the town. Dining has a lot of folks that currently cannot afford housing and hopefully, this will help retain those employees," said Detora.

PERSISTENT LACK OF CHILDCARE AFFECTS COLLEGE STAFF AS NEW CHILDCARE PROJECTS MOVE FORWARD

By EMILY HOGAN AND MANDY BERGHELA
Local Editors

College employees, including faculty and staff, highlight access to affordable childcare as a significant and pressing concern. Within the bounds of the town of Middlebury, childcare centers face long waitlists and struggle to balance adequate pay for center employees with affordable rates for parents.

Kailee Brickner-McDonald, the director of the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) had to wait eight months before getting off the waitlist for a childcare center.

"We had put our child on the waitlist before they were even born." Brickner said. "My husband and I were well equipped and were lucky to get a spot off the waitlist at the center, however that is not the case for a lot of families. When on the waitlist, you have to constantly check in on the waitlist and call, which takes up a lot of capacity."

Legislation such as the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Vermont Parental and Family Leave Act (VPFLA) ensures employees have 12 weeks of unpaid leave time per year after the birth or adoption of a child. College staff are also eligible for six weeks of paid leave after the birth of a child.

Brickner-McDonald noted that there is not much families can do after the six weeks of paid leave.

"Most childcare providers do not accept children that are only 6 weeks old." Brickne-McDonald said. "And this will impact the families with the least amount of resources the most."

The college currently offers two types of stipends to cover family care expenses for its faculty through its Family Care Stipend Program. While the original stipend offered up to $450 for care of family members while faculty were away at professional development activities, the college has recently created another program to cover on-campus activities that are outside of faculty's regular duties and hours, offering a stipend of up to $300.

An individual faculty member cannot receive more than $450 during any single fiscal year to cover these additional childcare expenses.

"It's modest, in this day and age, in terms of the amount of money, but it's a statement, and there's some substance behind this," said Jim Ralph, dean of the faculty.

Although the stipend covers a wide range of family care for extended hours, faculty cannot use the stipend to incur any costs of childcare during normal working hours, Ralph noted.

Moreover, there is no such program for staff.

The relatively small population of Middlebury leads to barriers with regards to employment at and the creation of additional adequate childcare facilities, Ralph described. He believes that there may be a way to take advantage of the student population at the college to eliminate some childcare needs through babysitting.

While the college administration does not have a formalized list of college sitters, Molly Johnsen, academic coordinator for the English and American Studies departments, helps to facilitate some of this work by matching students in those departments with local parents who need childcare in Addison County, including college professors and staff.

Johnsen began her matching work after hearing concerns from parents in Vergennes, Vt., where she previously lived, about the lack of access to childcare, and struggling with finding childcare herself. After getting permission to send out a request email to the English department, Johnsen created a public, shareable document in which she listed the names, availability and contact information of students willing to babysit.

"I hear a lot of gratitude from parents for it," Johnsen said.

Students have also been very responsive to her emails, and she puts students from other departments on the list who express interest. Anyone with access to the document can reach out to students who fit with their childcare or babysitting needs, and Johnsen noted that parents might be able to find many hours of childcare by reaching out to students available on different days.

JULIA PEPPER/THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS
Otter Creek Child Center is one option for daycare in Middlebury. A college subsidized project will combine Otter Creek center with College Street Children's Center, more than doubling the capacity of the two facilities.

Johnsen added that other faculty and staff have asked to access the list for childcare needs, and hopes that someone with more capacity to do this work will formalize the system into a college-wide list of students available for babysitting, possibly as a student enterprise or an administration-driven group. She hopes that students can someday get involved in running a childcare center on campus to meet the wide interest among faculty and staff who need the support.

Ralph explained how the long-term trends in limited childcare have compounded challenges for staff and faculty over time, doing little to relieve the pressure on families.

"I have seen, over the last 15 years, many cases where the hope for options doesn't emerge, and then people have to adjust," Ralph said. He added that means parents are driving away from Middlebury into other towns to drop their children off at childcare.

The college has been invested in providing childcare to its employees since 1990, when Ralph served on the Faculty Council and helped create what is now the Otter Creek Childcare Center. While Ralph's son had a spot at Otter Creek Childcare Center when he was born, there were no more spots available at the facility two years later when Ralph's daughter was born, which caused them to turn to Mary Johnson Children's Center.

"I'm an advocate for increasing the number of seats so that we can have spaces for infants and toddlers throughout our community," Ralph said.

Lack of childcare access has also served as a hiring challenge for the college, Johnsen said.

Johnsen is a mother of a two year-old son and is expecting another baby in late July, and has struggled to find childcare in town. Johnsen's son had been on multiple child care waitlists since November 2021, though he wasn't due until February 2022. Her son got off the waitlist at College Street Child Center in August 2022 after initially enrolling at Bristol Family Center,

"He didn't get off any waitlists for a while, and I was really frustrated and helpless," Johnsen said. She noted that she was fortunate that her job allows her to work remotely, so she worked fully remote for a period with her son in a carrier at home.

"I ended up doing a few weeks in June where I was working like that, but it was brutal, and I was really desperate," Johnsen said.

An established support system for staff could ease retention and hiring challenges, Johnsen added.

"If they had childcare as a built-in option for people, it would be a huge draw for hiring," she said. "The childcare crisis in this state is only adding to the fact that people might choose somewhere else over the college."

The issue of childcare access is one that the entire community feels strongly about, Ralph said. "We all as a community want to do what we can because these young people that are being looked after in childcare settings, they're the future."

We can't live without our staff. So why doesn't Middlebury pay them a livable wage?

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

Middlebury College is the largest employer in Addison County. The role of the college as an employer and lifeline to many workers in the community remains essential to building a stronger campus for staff and students alike. Despite improvements to wages and compensation systems, there remain structural issues facing Middlebury staff that the college has a duty to address. At the same time, students have a responsibility to create a safer and easier environment for college staff.

Staff at the college are currently compensated through a skill matrix system. Placed by their supervisors annually in a four category matrix of "learning," "growing," "thriving" or "leading," staff are indexed at 0%, 25%, 50% and 60% of the market range, respectively. This system grants a disproportionate amount of power to individual supervisors, who have the discretion to dictate staff members' salaries based on arbitrary — and sometimes reduced — definitions of their roles. Moreover, it places hard caps on staff members' salaries, which removes the incentive for staff to stay at the college.

We question the criteria of the Mercer Report indexing Middlebury staff wages to non-NESCAC institutions such as Roger Williams University and Suffolk University, which have substantially smaller endowments than Middlebury. Excepting movements up the skill matrix, which can only happen four times in an employee's Middlebury career, staff wage increases are limited to market raises based on comparison to the questionable peer institutions.

To put it simply: staff are not adequately compensated. The college's minimum wage for staff is $17.60 per hour, as compared to the livable wage for a single adult with no children in Addison County of $23.33 per hour, according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator.

We call for the college to make itself an attractive employer; pay staff a livable wage to give them the respect they deserve and compensation they earned. As witnessed in the library, with one third of library staff recently retiring or moving into other employment, staff are often having to take on roles not initially part of their jobs. Staff should not be asked to pick up extra slack to keep the college afloat and not see this in their compensation packages.

To the college administration, we question how Middlebury's new funding efforts, including the "For Every Future" campaign, and the recent $40 million unrestricted donation can be spent on improving staff compensation. The multi-year $600 million campaign outlines initiatives to raise money for financial aid programs, academic programs and student life, but makes no mention of staff compensation as a priority. We can't help but question if new fundraising is focused on the college's outward image, and may be leaving behind the workers that make our campus run smoothly.

For students, our responsibility lies in respect. We ask for a more deliberate and personal effort by students to ease the pressure on college staff, and create a safe and better environment for them. Students are reminded that seemingly mundane actions — leaving trash in corridors and bathrooms and throwing dining hall dishes in garbage cans — leave our facilities and dining staff with the added responsibility to clean up after our actions. Proctor Dining Hall recently displayed a whiteboard with statistics on missing dishes, and our staff issue reporting this week found that students often are throwing them out for facilities to have to fish out of the garbage. Students should not be so thoughtless in giving staff an extra burden on top of their already strenuous workloads.

We call for wider student conscientiousness on the role our staff play in the running of the campus. Often discussions around the college focus on faculty and student accomplishments. These are undoubtedly central to the success of our academic engagement on campus. Yet, we need a conscious recognition of staff as we go about our daily activities on campus. We have seen firsthand the impact of understaffing in college services. Campus services advertised as fundamental to the Middlebury experience, such as the Grille and Midd Xpress, through fall 2022 and spring 2023 suffered irregular operation hours and last-minute closures as both services experienced understaffing.

We recognize the immense passion many staff have towards their jobs in our campus community, and the dedication they have to helping make our experience as students as smooth as possible. But as Staff Council Representative Terry Simpkins told The Campus, "I have talked to staff who feel as though the college is sort of balancing the books on the backs of staff. And that doesn't feel great. Especially when you think of the reputation the college wants to pursue, the reputation the college tries to project"

Beyond just respect, students should fight for staff. There is an existing precedent to students working to improve the staff experience. As recently as 2019, hundreds of students protested in support of paying staff higher wages. Contributing to pressure to increase wages, from December 2019, entry level wages were increased from $11 to $14 an hour. Students should maintain this spirit of engagement, even if on a smaller scale, and recognise that no meaningful change on the issues they complain about can be achieved without including the voice of staff.

Staff are integral to how our campus operates on a daily basis. Facilities Services keep our spaces clean and safe. The campus is kept accessible after severe weather thanks to their work. Librarians help us expand our academic accomplishments. Retail workers give us access to food when the town closes for the night. This is an endless list that we cannot fully unpack in this piece, yet it is a list that often goes unnoticed. We call for our culture towards staff to change. Students and faculty may make the college, but it is the staff that make the campus.

Rumi & Ramadan

Op-Ed

Zahra Moeini Meybodi *is the Associate Muslim Chaplain and Interfaith Advisor at Middlebury.*

"Through faith [in Islam] rests on five pillars
By God, fasting is the greatest of them all!" — Rumi [Divan of Shams]

"Rumi" — a name that has become increasingly recognizable in American classrooms, literary circles and spiritual movements. With popular renditions and interpretations of *Molānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad al-Balkhi al-Rūmī*, or simply Rumi's writings in English, the 13th century Persian Muslim poet has become one of the most celebrated poets of our era.

When speaking of Rumi, all kinds of images are conjured: whirling dervishes, ecstatic mysticism and a spirituality that goes beyond institutional and organized religion. After all, in a famous rendition of Rumi, we read, "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there." While Rumi's overarching spirituality is undeniable, the lines between who Rumi historically was as a Muslim practitioner, scholar and poet, and who he is to the contemporary American reader as a universalist spiritual guru, is often blurry, and a question worth pursuing.

As someone who speaks Rumi's native language, Persian, and researches his poetry, I (and many others) have found that (with scholarly exceptions) popular English renditions often fail to echo Rumi's voice and vocabulary as a Muslim, and a practicing and a scholarly one at that. Perhaps looking at Rumi's attention to Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting and one of the main pillars of the faith currently taking place, can serve as a worthwhile avenue for us to delve deeper into Rumi's identity as a Muslim.

Ramadan marks the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, and it is the month in which the entirety of the Qur'an is believed to be revealed by the archangel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. Most notably, it is a practice in gaining what the Qur'an calls *Taqwa*, or consciousness of God. In order to do so, Muslims are obligated to fast from sunrise to sunset, exerting themselves in a spiritual cleanse wherein they seek to abstain from ill behavior, food and yes, even water.

So, what does Rumi have to say about the practice of fasting?

Ramadan and the Recovery of an Inner Voice

In an excerpt in the Divan of Shams, Rumi celebrates the commencement of the month of Ramadan, comparing it to a divine legion that revives the territories of the heart and soul. He writes:

"The month of fasting has arrived, the banner of [Divine] Majesty has arrived!
Abstain from food, for the table spread of Life has arrived!"

In another lyrical excerpt, he depicts the effects of fasting on the human being by comparing the person to a lyre, a traditionally stringed instrument that consists of a hollow wooden body:

"Oh, the sweetness of an empty stomach. Humans are like lyres — neither more, nor less. When a lyre's belly is full, there is no sound — and so, no lament, no highs nor lows. If fasting tires your brain, and burns your stomach — with every burn then, your heart, too, shall lament [to God]."

In colorful imagery, Rumi celebrates the commencement of Ramadan and anticipates a spiritual revival. Comparing the human being to the lyre, Rumi tells us that the fast's physical emptying of the body becomes the cause, ironically, for discovering a beautiful melody within: the human's calling and prayer to the Divine. The moments of loss and detachment, it seems, are actually to be embraced because they invite us to the purpose of our existence — which for Rumi is the human act of calling, loving and knowing God. It is an exercise in recovering the intrinsically divine character and essence we all have. The emptying provided by the physical fast is, essentially, a process of spiritual discovery. Taking the occasion of fasting and the month of Ramadan as vehicles for an inner transformation, Rumi's celebration of his Muslim identity and one of the most critical Islamic rituals, is made vivid and visible in his poetry.

Love for the Beloved in Spirit and Ritual

Rumi is also deeply mindful that fasting, as critical a practice as it is for Muslims, must be done with sincerity and intentionality. He says:

"There's him who worships, fasts and supplicates - praying, giving charity and more. Yet, he has no passion for the Divine Beloved. He worships, doing the deeds, but has no hint of sweetness. His worship is empty - meaningless! A hollow seed, with no pith. Passion is needed, so worship could blossom! A pith must be, so the seed could grow into a tree!"

Citing the different pillars of the Islamic faith, Rumi warns his audience that following merely the outward prescriptions of fasting is insufficient. Without sincere desire for God, these acts can become not only futile but even hypocritical. The antidote is to call out with the tune of yearning and desire for the Divine Beloved with *dhawq*, as Rumi says — an Arabic and Persian word denoting passion and excitement. But does this mean Rumi, as some popular translations depict, is dismissive of the outward Islamic rituals *as such*? No. He seems, rather, to demand much more of his reader - that is, his or her fast be done with a fullness of spirit, awareness and intention. Spirit without form, or form without spirit, would either lack direction or depth.

While popular renditions of Rumi have made him more accessible to the average American reader and those who are spiritually curious, there still exist the unfortunate complications of misrepresentation and cultural appropriation when it comes to Rumi's identity and practice as a Muslim. Shedding light on Rumi's celebration of Ramadan, including its inner teachings and external requisites, is all the more important in an era when conversations about diversification and decolonization of literature are at the forefront of our academic education.

COURTESY PHOTO/ZAHRA MOEINI MEYBODI
Rumi's mausoleum is located in Konya Turkey.

COURTESY PHOTO/ZAHRA MOEINI MEYBODI
A photo from Meybodi's trip to Rumi's mausoleum.

NOTES FROM THE DESK: WHY A 2024 STAFF ISSUE?

Op-Ed

Maggie Reynolds *is the Editor in Chief,* ***Katie Futterman*** *and* ***Ryan McElroy*** *are the Managing Editors.*

Since our last staff issue, Middlebury has unveiled a new skill-based compensation system, seen rising housing costs and childcare shortages, faced severe understaffing in the dining halls and Davis Family Library, and seen some of its most experienced staff members leave.

Students have their finger on the pulse of their peers' experiences at the college, and they passionately engage with professors on the daily, yet staff are often an afterthought — if they are thought of at all.

We write staff issues to give staff our platform to share their messages — what they want to change at Middlebury, how they feel about their work and their experiences finding housing and childcare in Vermont. We want to describe them as people, too: we asked about favorite songs to build a Proc playlist, major pop culture moments and stand-up side gigs.

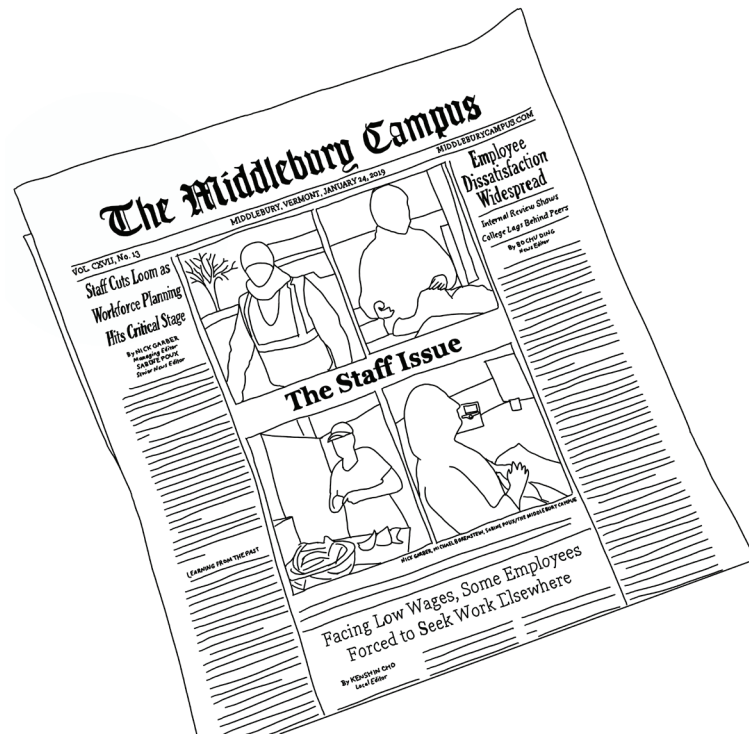
Staff at the college are an integral part of the student experience, from the revolutionary loudspeaker in Proctor to the instruction of Special Collections archivists and support from religious faith leaders. We aim to highlight the authentic staff experience at Middlebury — the positive, the negative, the exciting, the frustrating.

We cannot speak with every college employee or speak to every worthy cause, but through these pages we hope to touch on a number of issues and communities within the college's staffing.

To students and faculty, we hope you gain a new window into the lives of vital college employees who support you.

To administrators, we hope you consider the value of your staff and ways to recognize their work with duly earned respect and fair compensation.

To staff, we hope we have accurately represented your hard work, concerns and calls for change. And we hope you will continue to share your stories with us — our tip line is always open.


The Middlebury Campus
MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT, JANUARY 24, 2019
Staff Cuts Loom as Workforce Planning Hits Critical Stage
Employee Dissatisfaction Widespread
The Staff Issue
Facing Low Wages, Some Employees Forced to Seek Work Elsewhere

The Middlebury Campus

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With a pinch of Saltveit

By ACADIA KLEPEIS
Senior Arts & Culture Editor

Saltveit demonstrates one of the most common palindromes. COURTESY PHOTO / CALEB KENNA

If you are a Middlebury student, chances are you already know Mark Saltveit's voice.

"Good afternoon, the Davis Family Library will be closing at 5 p.m. today. Should you want to continue working, Crossroads Cafe is open 24/7, although I don't know why you would want to continue working when it's such a beautiful day outside," his voice bellows across the library intercoms on a Saturday afternoon, jolting students from their laptop-induced haze.

Some are spurred to action, typing frantically to make up for lost time, while others see the announcement as a divine sign to leave.

Saltveit is a Circulation Desk supervisor at Davis, where he has worked since moving to Middlebury in 2020 with his wife, Theatre Professor Olga Sanchez Saltveit. His schedule at the library is heavy on nights and weekends, leading to his task as "the voice of Davis." As a supervisor, he also works closely with the two student employees on duty.

"The best part of the job is just working with the students," Saltveit said. "I really like the students I've met at Midd — they're interesting, from around the world. They speak a bunch of different languages, come from different countries. It's just fascinating."

The Davis microphone isn't the only one for which Saltveit has a proclivity, however: He is also an active stand-up comedian. After getting his start at west coast boutique comedy clubs in California and his home state of Oregon, Saltveit now travels across the Atlantic every year for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, where he hosts creative events riffing on his eclectic interests. For instance, one of his kid-friendly performances is titled "Ancient Coins from Forgotten Kingdoms."

Saltveit is quick to point out that he isn't making a mint, however, as he performs at what is known as the Free Fringe, which is open to all. Closer to home, Saltveit hosted Town Hall Theater's "Tina Friml and Friends Night of Comedy" last June.

Of all these hats, the one he is best known for is that of a specific breed of wordsmith: a palindromist — which, he corrected me immediately, ought to be pronounced pa-LIN-dro-mist, not pa-lin-DRO-mist. It was our own little leviOsa not levioSA moment. Indeed, the Hermione Granger metaphor may not be far off — with all his interests, it seems that Saltveit too would benefit from a Time-Turner.

A key moment to turn back to is March 2012. In Brooklyn, Saltveit was competing in the inaugural World Palindrome Championship, hosted by enigmatologist and New York Times crossword editor Will Shortz, who's an idol of grid-obsessed word nerds everywhere (play The Campus' weekly crossword here). In a set amount of time, contestants had to write an original palindrome (a word or phrase that is the same forwards and backward, like "racecar" or "kayak") according to a prompt.

Saltveit explained that writing a palindrome is like an inkblot test: You never know what's going to come out. "You have to take what the language gives you," he said. More concrete advice for writing your own? Start in the middle.

Saltveit won the contest, becoming the first World Palindrome Champion, with the phrase "Devil Kay fixes trapeze part; sex if yak lived."

Saltveit cited a childhood interest in palindromes but admitted that he didn't reconnect with the form until the '90s. After a job reviewing zines, his bosses urged him to create his own.

"No one was doing anything about palindromes," Saltveit said. "And it was the perfect little niche topic for a zine."

With that, The Palindromist magazine was born. Saltveit described the blossoming of a community of several hundred individuals obsessed with tracking down symmetrical sentences, including early subscriber Shortz. This group of logophiles are also the subject of the 2021 documentary "The Palindromists," which features Saltveit. He still aims to publish an issue of the magazine every few years, stubbornly sticking to print.

Saltveit's passion for palindromes has also pushed him toward formal academia. His personal interest in the history of the form led him down a series of rabbit holes.

"Before I knew it, I was the world's expert on Latin palindromes," he said, admitting that this was shocking for a man who did not speak Latin.

Still, with a degree in social science from Harvard University, Saltveit was up to the challenge.

"I discovered, somewhat accidentally, a lost collection of Roman poetry," Saltveit exclaimed, recalling his aha moment in the archives of the British Library. The text he was referring to dates from sometime between the fourth and sixth centuries and is so worn that Saltveit and his research team (including Davis Circulations Specialist Rachel Fickes and Professor of Classics at Cornell University Mike Fontaine) are relying on high-tech scans to help them decipher the full text. For now, it includes eight palindromes, five of which are being read for the first time by modern scholars. "It's kind of a big deal in medieval scholarship, or even classics," he added.

What's next? In between editing an academic article about this latest project, Saltveit plans to attend a six-week clown course in France this summer before returning to Free Fringe.

While constant reinvention might sound exhausting to some, Saltveit isn't losing any sleep. Since finding a book about Chinese philosophy on his parents' shelf as a tween, Saltveit has engaged and experimented with Taoism in his own life. "It keeps ringing true," he said. He even writes a blog called Taoish.

"Part of my Taoist philosophy is to just follow where it leads," he said. "And not worry about imposing a structure on it."

Popping the question: Middlebury staff's defining pop culture memories

By JACK TORPEY
Arts & Culture Editor

Popular culture. It's the music we listen to, the movies we watch and, in this media-saturated twenty-first century, it seems to be the very air we breathe. There's no escaping pop culture — just ask the Middlebury staff.

The Campus recently emailed a selection of staff members, offering each the chance to answer a single question: "What pop culture moment stands out most in your memory?"

As students, we know these individuals as librarians, career advisors and technology specialists, among other roles. But as the responding staff members' generously enthusiastic answers suggest, they are also concert fanatics, movie buffs and former MTV teens. Here is a glimpse at what pop culture means to the people who make Middlebury run.

Attending a musical performance by a favorite artist is an electrifying experience that cannot truly be described in words. That said, the overwhelming majority of staff respondents who cited a concert as their defining pop culture memory sure took language's ability to capture the thrill of live music to its compelling limit.

Caroline Crawford, senior writer in the marketing & creative services department, recalled traveling with her older brother and his friends to Giants Stadium for her first concert: Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band performing in the rocker's beloved home state of New Jersey during the iconic 1984 "Born in the U.S.A" tour.

"I was so close to Bruce that I could see him sweating," Crawford wrote. "The concert lasted 4.5 hours and is still the best concert I've ever seen (and I've seen a lot)."

The best concert experience of ADA Coordinator Jodi Litchfield's life was attending a Queen + Adam Lambert concert in London with her friends in June 2022.

"[It was] a huge deal to see Queen in their hometown as a die-hard fan!" Litchfield said.

Arts Events Manager Molly Andres reflected on seeing several leading '80s musical groups perform live throughout her teenage years, including Tears for Fears, Wham!, Duran Duran and INXS. The show that she seemed to remember most fondly, however, was a concert in her senior year of high school put on by none other than Billy Idol.

"[M]y friends and I ... skipped class and queued up early," Andres wrote. "We had a blast waiting together all day, wrapped in blankets and doing food runs. In the end, we got amazing seats and rocked out to 'White Wedding.'"

Many years later, Andres is still a frequent concertgoer, now singing along with her 14-year-old daughter to the voices of Noah Kahan and Louis Tomlinson.

"Let's just say, I'm having fun feeling like a teen again," she joked.

Associate Director of Career Advising Alicia Gomez also views concerts as opportunities to bond with family. Gomez remembered being in middle school and her dad taking her to New York City to see a performance by the Latin pop star Carlos Vives, whose Colombian heritage was a source of pride for many in attendance.

"My dad is Colombian. When I walked into the concert venue that day, I felt like I was walking into a family reunion," Gomez wrote. "I saw so many Colombian flags waving in the air, and we all sang along. It is one of my happiest childhood memories."

Though many would say it's the best way, going to a concert is not the only way to experience the joys of music. For the responding staff members who came of age in the '80s, television was a powerful medium for interacting with artists and enjoying their latest hits. No development of the decade was more foundational to this cultural practice than the debut of MTV in August 1981, which a handful of respondents, including Dean of Admissions Nicole Curvin, identified as a core pop culture memory.

"I recall the launch (1981) and impact of MTV — bringing more musical artists into [the] mainstream," Curvin wrote. "Although MTV was slow to fully embrace diverse and world musicians initially, I appreciated the artistry and storytelling of the music videos they played."

Curvin specifically remembered one song rising above the rest in the MTV video cycle: "Thriller," Michael Jackson's 1982 smash single off the eponymous best-selling album of all time. As she put it, the song "was a big deal at the time."

It is a testament to how dominant of a cultural force the "King of Pop" was during his reign that Curvin's was not the only "Thriller"-centric response received by The Campus. Recounting a birthday party at a roller rink that she went to when she was eight, Film and Media Librarian Amy Frazier described how she and the rest of the skating kids screeched to a standstill when a large screen playing music videos flashed to the zombie-themed hit.

"Everyone congregated at the end of the rink, kids even sat on the floor, and we all just watched," Frazier wrote. "It was Michael Jackson's 'Thriller,' and it demanded our undivided attention."

None of the respondents got the chance to meet Jackson — an encounter that would have almost certainly taken the pop culture memory crown — but there were still some amazing celebrity run-ins reported by Middlebury's staff. Nate Burt, manager of the IT Service Desk, had such a run-in with another of New Jersey's hard-rocking sons.

"In April 2009, my family shared a crowded 4 a.m. airport van from a Vegas hotel with Jon Bon Jovi and his band," Burt wrote. Playing it cool, he and his family went the whole ride without giving anything more than "a few quiet greetings or nods" to the legend behind "Livin' on a Prayer."

Director of the Mahaney Arts Center Liza Sacheli had a direct celebrity encounter when she was invited backstage after a 2016 Broadway performance of "Hamilton."

"We'd brought Daveed Digs (who played Jefferson/Lafayette) to Middlebury for a Performing Arts Series event a couple years prior, and he invited me on-stage after the show. I got to meet Lin-Manuel Miranda!" Sacheli wrote, adding that her moment with the rapping Alexander Hamilton himself occurred just weeks before his musical swept the Tony Awards.

Las Vegas and New York City are ideal settings to bump into the famous, but for Ethan Murphy, audiovisual technical director of the Film and Media Culture department, it wasn't necessary to step outside his office.

"I'm pretty oblivious when it comes to student last names and try not to get caught up with the idea of celebrity," Murphy admitted. But when a graduating student came by his office to introduce him to his visiting grandfather, the film enthusiast was "legitimately starstruck" to find himself shaking hands with actor and filmmaker Robert Redford.

Murphy's brush with Hollywood royalty is a reminder that pop culture is more than music, with that storied SoCal locale serving as a wellspring for many of the most indelible works of mass entertainment. This point is not lost on MIIS Career & Academic Advisor Scott Webb, who as a child got to take two truly once-in-a-lifetime trips to the movie theater.

"I'm a Generation X person, born in 1973 ... I saw the original 'Star Wars' ('Episode IV - A New Hope') in theaters. Also the original 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' (and basically most blockbuster movies of the '80s)," Webb wrote of his formative filmgoing experiences.

As this memory and many of the others offered by Middlebury's staff demonstrate, people are most susceptible to singularly meaningful pop culture experiences when they are young. The vividness with which the responding staff narrated their stories, however, proves that the best music, movies and other features of pop culture are often not just life-changing but life-lasting. To all the respondents, thank you for letting the Middlebury community briefly share in these cherished moments.

From the Archives: Viola Chittenden White, the college's first Abernathy Library Curator

By CHARLIE KEOHANE
Editor at Large

During the 2022-2023 school year, over 2,000 students visited Special Collections with a class, but few know the history of the collection and the woman who began curating it.

Upon his death in 1923, Julian Willis Abernethy '76, donated his entire book collection to Middlebury. Abernathy's will stipulated that the books — including a sizable collection of works by Henry David Thoreau — must be kept behind glass and cared for. In order to preserve and grow the library, Viola Chittenden White joined the staff at Middlebury College in 1933 as the first curator of the Abernethy Library of American Literature.

Born in 1890 in New York City, White was a lifelong reader and voracious writer. She graduated from Wellesley College in 1911 before receiving a master's degree from Columbia University and a PhD from the University of North Carolina. While pursuing her PhD, White wrote the first doctoral dissertation on American Renaissance writer Herman Melville.

Like Abernethy himself, White largely preferred 19th-century literature. She served as curator of the library until she retired in 1956, amassing some of the college's most valuable items, including two rare manuscripts by Emily Dickinson, a signed copy of Robert Frost's first book, "A Boy's Will," and a first edition copy of "Leaves of Grass" by Walt Whitman. In 1939, she purchased one of the college's most valuable items: Henry David Thoreau's personal, annotated first edition copy of "Walden."

In addition to curatorial work, White wrote poetry. Her first volume of poetry, "Horizons," was published by Yale University Press in 1921. White went on to publish several other volumes and was the first woman to be selected in the Yale Series for Younger Poets.

White left over 5,000 manuscript pages behind upon her death in 1977. Her friend Storrs Lee edited her journals and published them in a collection called "Partridge in a Swamp," the title a reference to a 1936 journal entry in which she asked, "Why do I hide my life like a partridge in the swamp?" Special Collections has some of White's original journal pages, as well as copies of her books and "Partridge in a Swamp."

White never married nor had children, instead choosing a more solitary life in Vermont. Lee described White as "essentially a loner, too shy to be a joiner." She spent significant time in nature, often walking a twelve-mile loop to East Middlebury for breakfast at the local inn. She took a keen interest in the natural world, chronicling her walks in journals, which were later published in the volumes "Not Faster Than a Walk" (1939) and "A Vermont Diary" (1956).

Throughout her journal entries, White displayed her characteristic wit and introverted nature. In an entry from September 22, 1934, she wrote, "The President's Reception for the faculty was held last night. What a fantastic way to enjoy ourselves, dolled up in stiff attire, talking platitudes for hours. Only, I did not fulfill either equation, for I did not enjoy myself and I came home after the first hour."

Her journals also revealed a more radical side. Before coming to Middlebury, White was affiliated with the Socialist Party and pacifist movements. By 1940, she compiled an inventory of Abernethy's collection and continued to build the college's library until her retirement in 1956.

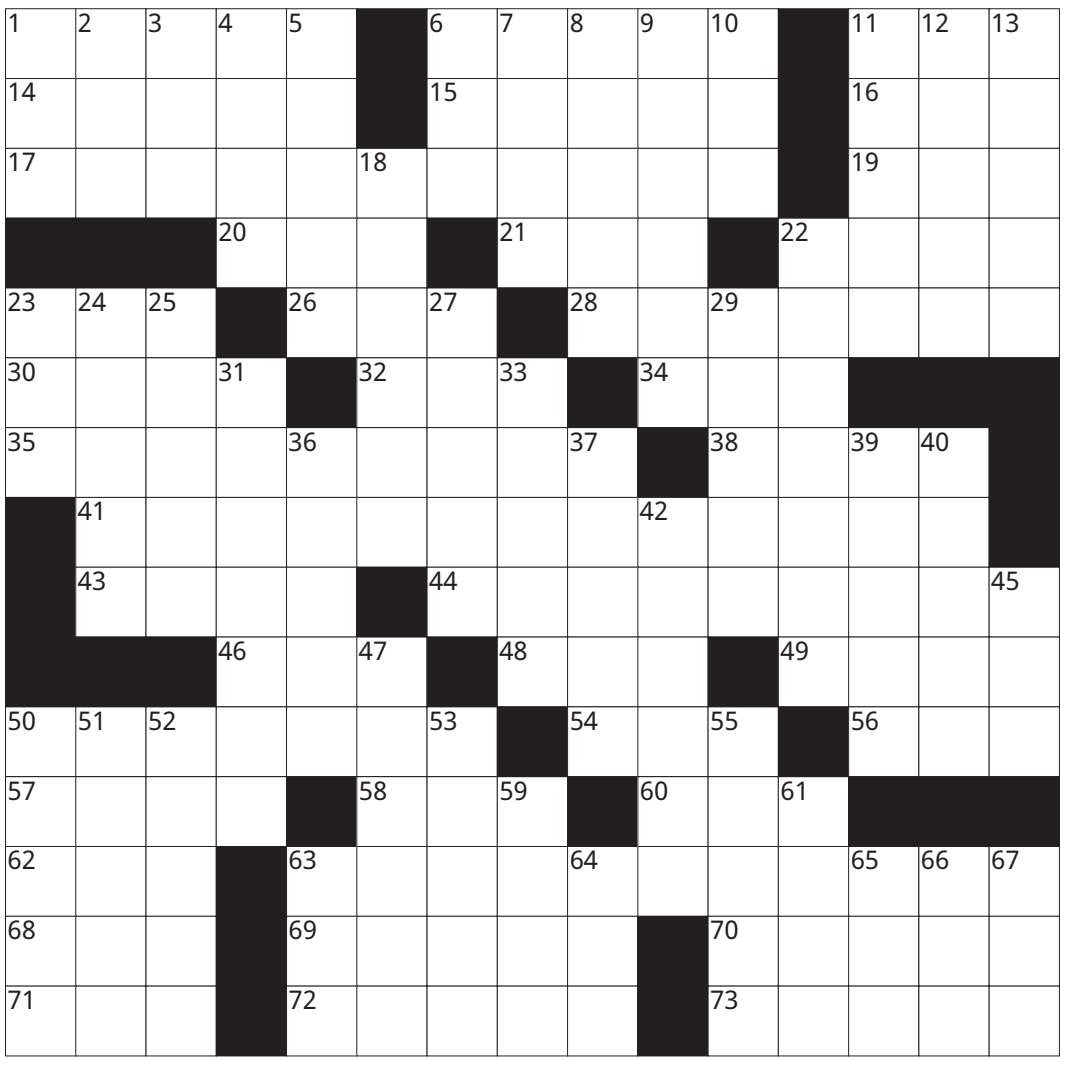
White's devotion to academic learning, particularly notable in a time in which few women pursued PhDs, was instrumental in caring for and building the rich library that Special Collections boasts today. She is remembered for her important acquisitions and her carefully observed reflections on daily life, as an entry from 1934 notes.

"The part of my job which I do not enjoy is the social part — forcing students to take interest in the Abernethy collection," White wrote. "The book buying is good fun, and in humble minor ways the position dovetails very neatly into my private life."

COURTESY PHOTO/SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
Viola White in the 1910s.

Joking Around

Egan Turner



ACROSS
1 With 73-Across, Monday's holiday, and an apt description of 17-Across, 28-Across, 41-Across, 50-Across, and 63-Across
6 A&M athlete
11 Like cuddling in the Grille
14 Go after
15 Destined (to)
16 Type of wrestling
17 "Coming to America" comedian born on the 3rd
19 Thai neighbor
20 Reggae cousin
21 Seventh Greek letter
22 Stitched together
23 "___ is me!"
26 Use a chair
28 "Beef" comedian born on the 19th
30 An obnoxious person
32 Brooklyn NBAer
34 "Fall Out Boy" genre
35 Common Battell occurrence (unfortunately for me)
38 Largest species of dolphin
41 "Bee Movie" comedian born on the 29th
43 Comedian Sandler (who was born in September)
44 What an apocalypse signifies
46 XXX/X
48 71-Across, to Luke
49 Exclude
50 "The Tonight Show" comedian born on the 28th
54 Dir. from Atwater to Proc
56 "Butter" band
57 Big heads
58 "Obviously!"
60 "Past Lives" actor Yoo
62 Lil ___ X
63 "Late Night" comedian born on the 18th
68 Medical research org.
69 2014 Olympic host city
70 Medical prefix meaning "bone"
71 "The Phantom Menace" boy
72 A magic bar or maple soft serve, for instance
73 See 1-Across

DOWN
1 Score highly on an exam
2 Prof's deg.
3 "Cool, dude!"
4 Ice Spice's legal name
5 Onion relatives
6 ___ Dhabi
7 Former VP Al
8 Ancient Indian empire
9 Get some air
10 Last name in ice cream
11 Neo's foe?
12 Sketched
13 ___ Us
18 For the most part
22 Gave one's word
23 "!?!?!?"
24 Board that named itself
25 Made mistakes
27 Make fun of
29 "See ya later!"
31 Gets off track?
33 Current style
36 "The Social Network" actor Hammer
37 The original Goldfinger?
39 Ascend, as a 46er
40 Let in
42 Greets silently
45 Otherworldly beings, for short
47 Within walls
50 "The Office" actress Fischer
51 Once more
52 Nintendo dinosaur
53 Pound part
55 "You spin a ___ lies!"
59 "That's hilarious!"
61 Roughly
63 Wisconsin winter hrs.
64 Minor complaint
65 "How was ___ know?"
66 Sushi fish
67 Negative responses

PROC PLAYLIST: DINNER AND A SONG

By ACADIA KLEPEIS
Senior Arts & Culture Editor

When we think about music at 58 Hepburn Road, minds jump to the WRMC radio station. But let us not overlook the other musical hub at the same address: Proctor Dining Hall itself.

If you walk into the dining hall on a typical morning, weekday or weekend, you cannot help but be swept up by classically feel-good tunes. Making a bagel, you tap your toe to Taylor Swift. Pouring your coffee, you hum along to Queen. As you walk past the dish room on the way to the booths, you can't help but sing aloud as Michael Bublé streams through the door.

To find out more about the morning music-makers, The Campus reached out to the pulse of the dining hall: its staff members. Read on to discover the tunes that make them tick.

John Hughes – Cook, Proctor Dining Hall
Song 1: "Don't Stop Believin'"
Album: "Escape" (1981) by Journey
Blurb: Probably one of the best songs ever! This song has played many times in all the kitchens I have worked in throughout my 30 years of experience.

Song 2: "Cotton Eye Joe"
Album: "Sex & Violins" (1995) by Rednex
Blurb: Lots of Thursday mornings I'll just put on the one-hit wonders station. Students seem to really love hearing one-hit wonders. Also if you are lucky you can catch a few of my co-workers performing the dance that goes with the song.

Patrick Greene – Prep Cook, Atwater Dining Hall
Song: "'Til You Can't"
Album: "Human The Double Album" (2021) by Cody Johnson
Blurb: I like this song because life is too short. Don't give up, take your chance, and live it.

For some dining hall staff, choosing a song or two was just too tall an order! Here are a few extra servings:

Dean Bachand – Sous Chef, Ross Dining Hall
Songs: "Let it Be" (The Beatles), "Tangled up in Blue" (Bob Dylan), "Throwing Stones" (Grateful Dead), "Jimmy Olsen's Blues" (Spin Doctors), "Romeo and Juliet" (Dire Straits), "You Can Call Me Al" (Paul Simon), and "The Boxer" (Simon & Garfunkel).

Wren Hobbs – Cook
Songs: A self-professed "huge music lover," Wren had a list of 75 songs to recommend! While we couldn't include them all here, his favorite artists included Dua Lipa, Taylor Swift and Twenty One Pilots.
Top of the list? "Levitating (feat. DaBaby)" (Dua Lipa), "Dancing in the Moonlight" (Toploader), "C'est La Vie" (Yung Gravy, bbno$ & Rich Brian) and "Daylight" (Matt and Kim).

Chris Laframboise – Chef, Ross Dining Hall
Album: "Hartford 5/15/2010 Bootleg" (2010) by Pearl Jam
Blurb: I'm a huge fan of music, and my go-to band is Pearl Jam. One thing Pearl Jam does is they record all their concerts and within 24 hours you can download a professional recorded show. Each show is different and unique. Eddie Vedder (Lead Singer) will learn the history and current events of the city they are playing in and alter lyrics in some songs to reflect the city. They also are incredible about interacting with the crowd, and this makes the experience all the more special. Not only was it one of the many Pearl Jam shows I've been to, but it's kind of nice to be able to relive the experience whenever I want.
Song 1: "Off the Ground"
Album: "Give It Back to You" (2016) by The Record Company
Blurb: A great song about looking inward and realizing you need to help yourself, and that could be taking yourself out of your current [situation] and finding a new one.
Song 2: "Keep The Wolves Away"
Album: "And You Are Me" (2012) by Uncle Lucius
Blurb: It's rare to find a song that tells a story so clearly from beginning to end. Not only that, but it's a true story. You just do not come across songs like this that often. Live versions are the best.
Song 3: "The Lion The Beast The Beat"
Album: "The Lion The Beast The Beat" (2012) by Grace Potter and the Nocturnals
Blurb: Local band, just love how slow it starts and slowly builds; then the change, just great. Similar to The Black Keys' "Little Black Submarines" or Noah Kahan's "Your Needs, My Needs." Live versions are the best.
Song 4: "Figure It Out"
Album: "Royal Blood" (2014) by Royal Blood
Blurb: Two guys making all that noise with just a bass and drums.
Song 5: "Burn To Shine"
Album: "Burn To Shine" (1999) by Ben Harper & The Innocent Criminals
Blurb: It's Ben Harper – can't go wrong, seen him multiple times.

Through such a variety of music, Proc staff members concretize the idea of "dinner and a show." Let this be a sign: the next time you walk into Proc, take off your headphones and listen to the music that is already playing. You might just hear your new (or old) favorite song.

The staff who review the New England Review

By CATHERINE GOODRICH
Arts & Culture Editor

CHARLIE DEICHMAN-CASWELL / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The New England review makes its home across from the swingset near Twilight Hall.

Across from the swing set outside of Twilight Hall, in the New England Review office, a box of newly minted issues of Volume 45.1 sits beside a shelf of archival issues dating back to the magazine's founding in 1978. Led by Editor Carolyn Kuebler '90 and Managing Editor Leslie Sainz, NER delicately toes the line between maintaining a prestigious reputation and a welcoming appeal.

Started by friends and then-colleagues Sydney Lea and D.E. Axinn professor of English and creative writing, Jay Parini, The New England Review (NER) is a literary magazine on a mission to publish distinguished and debut authors alike on a quarterly basis. The magazine has been sponsored by Middlebury College since 1987, providing students with opportunities to engage with important and high-quality art and to better understand the publishing process.

"I think it's terrific for the college to support this journal, now decades into its life. It's been a wonderful resource on campus, a place where students can get hands-on experience of editing," Parini wrote in an email to the Campus. "The quarterly draws eyes to Middlebury as a place where writing — creative writing — is valued, even central."

NER is a Swiss Army Knife of poetry, prose, nonfiction and translation, which, despite receiving thousands of submissions each year, manages to find the time to cultivate a sense of community between authors, readers and students.

"It's great to have a journal but it's even better to have a journal that students can learn things from," Kuebler said.

With student-related events programming including reading groups and student reading nights, semester-long internships and the NER Out Loud Podcast show, the NER team makes it easy for students to learn something valuable from the magazine's presence on campus.

"I think it's really important for a magazine that's published by a college to have involvement with the college," Kuebler said. "I also think it's great for us to have the energy and the new perspectives that students bring and I think it's good for them too."

Current NER intern Cole Chaudhari '26 agreed.

"I think students should engage with the NER because — at least for those interested in all things literary/publishing — it offers each intern an experiential window into the real nuts and bolts of a literary magazine," Chaudhari wrote in an email to the Campus. "The NER internships allow students to participate directly in the making, and to actively contribute towards a product that usually is only presented in completed form."

And it takes a village to get an issue of the NER to its completed form. The magazine's submissions are looked over by about 30 readers who work with genre editors to compile a finalist pile that reaches Keubler's desk. Based on Keubler's decisions, pieces are then refined and copy-edited by Sainz, who collaborates with authors to publish a piece that is as close to perfect as possible.

"I'd say my favorite part of editing is working closely with authors," Sainz said. This intensive editing process requires substantial communication, and Sainz noted, "It's just so satisfying to know that I had a part in presenting someone else's work that I deeply believe in and that they're pleased with. I mean that's so important to us. And I will say, NER is very known for its intimate editorial exchanges and it's something that we're really proud of."

Kuebler affirmed the efforts NER makes to be prompt in communicating with writers, and maintaining the writers' original sentiments in the final pieces.

"We try to create a sense of community among writers, even writers we don't publish because I mean, that's the vast majority. We publish less than 1% of the submissions we get," she added.

Kuebler has a debut novel coming out in May, and Sainz published a collection of poetry last year. Kuebler and Sainz know the struggles and vulnerabilities of the road to publication as intimately as anyone.

As long-time writers, editors and readers, the pair are also well-acquainted with the pleasures and trials of studying English and pursuing literary careers.

"My advice is, as far as job opportunities go, there is far more that an English major is qualified for than what they're initially told," Sainz said. "I think it's just a matter of stretching one's imagination a bit on how you can translate very concrete critical analysis skills and even practical textual skills into a variety of different positions."

Keubler agreed with the wide applications of the English major.

"The cross-cultural understanding that English majors get from reading all kinds of different literature so there's a way in which you can understand different ways of speaking, different voices and bring those together that I think English majors are particularly well-equipped to understand the way other people communicate," she said.

After attending Middlebury in the '80s, Kuebler founded the book review magazine Rain Taxi and joined NER in 2004 as a Managing Editor. She became the second-ever Editor-in-Chief of NER in 2014.

"Being back here is really cool because I get to see what students are up to now and the students definitely bring in a burst of energy into the door and they have so much interest," Kuebler said. "They're really thoughtful people. We really love our reading group where we have students respond to submissions and their responses are inevitably going to be different from ours and so we love to hear what they have to say."

"It's really exciting to think we're fostering the next generation of readers and authors and editors through these opportunities by passing along the knowledge we have and we've seen that come back tenfold," Sainz added.

NER is a prime demonstration of the high-quality community it takes to cultivate a high-quality publication. A community whose zeal is reflected in the reputable and exceptional work they curate.

Editors' Note: Cole Chaudhari '26 is a News Editor for The Campus.

ATHLETIC PHOTOGRAPHER WILL COSTELLO CAPTURES DOMINANCE THROUGH HIS LENS

By JACK McGUIRE
Sports Editor

In recent years, Middlebury athletics has dominated its competition. Since the fall of 2019 Middlebury sports teams have won 17 NESCAC Championships and seven National Championships. Most of this dominance has been recorded and preserved by one man: Middlebury athletic photographer Will Costello.

Costello has officially been working with the Middlebury Athletic department since 2006 when he first took photos during the men's hockey team's 2006 NCAA semifinal victory over Elmira College. Since then, Costello has increased his role with the team and has documented the countless successes of Middlebury Athletics.

Costello got his start in sports photography in the early 1970s when he took photos of World Hockey Association games. The World Hockey Association was a professional North American hockey league that competed with the NHL from 1971 to 1979. Costello saw beauty in the game of hockey and wanted to capture the sport.

"I was really drawn to the game because it was so athletic," Costello said. "Just the motion and the movement of people in the athleticism was pretty phenomenal."

After cutting his teeth in sports photography with the World Hockey Association, Costello moved to New England in the late 1970s. While he was not as much engaged with photography for about a decade, the dawn of digital photography in the mid 1990s rekindled his interest. Living in Ripton, Vt., Costello started to take photos of local events and Middlebury sports games, but he developed a particular interest in the Middlebury men's hockey team.

The men's hockey team dominated in the late 1990s and early 2000s, winning five straight National Championships from 1995 to 1999 and then winning three more from 2004 to 2006. While Costello initially took photos of the team for personal interest, the college asked him to officially take photos for the school in 2006. Since then, Costello's role with the athletics department has dramatically increased.

"In a lot of the earlier years, I traveled around with the hockey team away games, you know, just about every game of the season, and then [Middlebury] asked me to begin doing some other things," Costello said. "I've branched out. Now I do quite a few things with the exception of swimming and diving."

Through this diversity of coverage, Costello has developed a new appreciation for a variety of different sports and teams at Middlebury.

COURTESY PHOTO/WILL COSTELLO
Will Costello has been photographing Middlebury's teams since 2006.

COURTESY PHOTO/WILL COSTELLO
Athletic photographer Will Costello took this photo after the Middlebury field hockey team won the NCAA Championship in 2021.

"70 years ago I had no idea what lacrosse was all about, so I've come to appreciate that, and field hockey, even though the pace isn't quite as frenetic [as hockey], it's just such an art and style, especially the way it's played in Middlebury obviously," he said.

As different sports teams start and end their season at Middlebury, Costello is almost always on the sidelines memorializing athletes and their performances. Because of the different schedules of each team, Costello is busy and has to stay flexible to accommodate each team.

"It's a different rhythm in different seasons," Costello said. "I'm sometimes shooting maybe four or five times a week. Sometimes doubleheaders."

But Costello tolerates his busy schedule because he knows people value the work he is doing. He appreciates when parents or students email him or stop him at games to express their support for his photography. Costello sometimes makes slideshows or commemorative books for teams at the ends of their seasons, and it gratifies him when he sees people appreciate his work.

Now in his 18th year working with the college, Costello looks to maintain the aspects of his photography that have made him successful.

"My main efforts still is to get a single frame or series of frames that capture that story," he said. "Things are going well, so I'll stick with what I have until I'm convinced otherwise."

Players, coaches, community: insights into the world of varsity assistant coaches

By GAVIN RANDOLPH
Contributing Writer

To be an assistant coach requires a unique skillset: interpersonal skills, an ambition for impact and little desire for recognition. Assistant coaches play critical roles in the success of their teams, yet often get less appreciation for the mentorship and value they provide.

For Amy Patton of women's lacrosse, coaching is all about the relationships made on and off the field.

"I think that sport provides us with so many avenues for life learning," she said. "Why am I still coaching? Why am I still doing this? It's for the connections and the impact and the joy."

Before coaching, Patton had a successful collegiate career at University of Maryland, earning All-American and All-ACC praise while playing on the school's lacrosse and hockey teams. She also served as the head coach of the U.S. Women's National Development Team and Dartmouth College before making the move to Middlebury, where she has contributed to three NCAA championships. While she may not earn the same plaudits as once did as a head coach, Patton enjoys the freedom of her assistant role.

"I think that I enjoy being an assistant coach more because I can focus more on the coaching piece," she said. "For head coaches, there is so much going on that you have to oversee, and sometimes you can get lost in that."

COURTESY PHOTO
Patton has been an assistant lacrosse coach at Middlebury since 2019.

For others such as Tim Peng of men's soccer, the desire to coach also came from the mentoring opportunity it presented.

"As a player, I often found myself in situations where I would be willing to do the work but didn't have the guidance on what the right things to do were," he said. "I wanted to get into coaching so that people like my younger self, who wanted to be their best and were hungry to improve, could have that person to give them guidance and get them closer to their dreams."

Having played at NESCAC rival Trinity College for four years, Peng is familiar with soccer at the DIII level, and what it takes to succeed in such a competitive environment.

COURTESY PHOTO
Peng has experience with DIII mens' soccer as both an athlete and a coach.

When asked what his goals were for the program, Peng expressed a commitment to continuing the momentum of past years and creating a team that could adapt well in adverse circumstances.

After his collegiate playing career, Peng served as the assistant coach at Babson College, where he helped lead his team to three NEWMAC conference championships. Now at Middlebury, he looks forward to facing Babson in the regular season and experiencing the unique opportunity that Middlebury presents.

"After talking about five minutes with Head Coach Elias, I knew [Middlebury] would be the best place for me and the best place for me to continue to grow as a person," he said. "Middlebury has the facilities, they have the support, but what gives it the competitive advantage are the people, from the staff to the fans."

COURTESY PHOTO
Fitzgerald came into his role at Middlebury after coaching mens' hockey at Amherst for four years.

Coach Jack Fitzgerald of men's hockey echoed the sentiment, highlighting the thriving faculty ecosystem of the Middlebury community. You can find him — along with other coaches, staff and locals — playing pickup basketball together in Pepin Gymnasium most days of the week.

"It's a phenomenal crew and an absolutely great work environment," he said. "The kids that come to Middlebury want to be at Middlebury. Same with faculty and staff. And that's special."

Prior to Middlebury, Fitzgerald played four years and coached four years at Amherst College, where he became quite familiar with the Middlebury program. He joined the team this past season in a time where they had only four games of playoff experience throughout their entire squad.

When asked what his vision was for the program coming into this season, Fitzgerald said, "We are trying to reinstill a culture of improvement in the team, focusing on the little things in practice that will translate to the game. We want to create a more professional environment, because at the end of the day, they're going to incorporate that into their jobs when they leave."

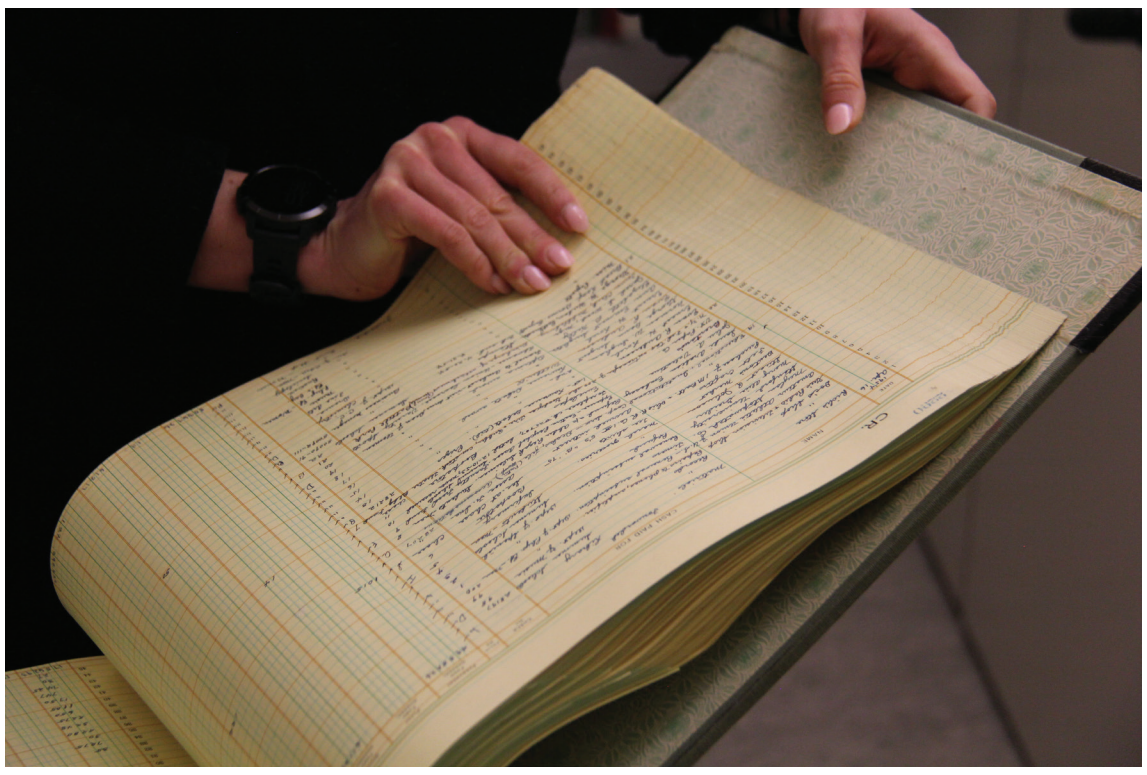
In his first season as assistant coach, Fitzgerald helped lead the men's hockey team to their first NESCAC playoff win since 2016, giving NCAA finalists Trinity College a tough match up in the next round. Fitzgerald seeks to build on this momentum and is excited for the future to come.

As much success as all these coaches have experienced on the field — inspiring and mentoring young college players — they enjoy all of the other things Middlebury has to offer. Away from the athletic center, these coaches like taking advantage of the Middlebury Outdoors through golfing, hiking, mountain biking, skiing and snowboarding.

"Being a coach isn't my whole identity," Peng said. "While it is a huge part of my life, being able to separate a little bit from that and being able to find things I enjoy doing outside of the game is just as important."

INTO THE ARCHIVES

The staff at the heart of Middlebury Special Collections



Special Collections staff member Mikaela Taylor '15 works her way through a 1954 financial ledger, detailing cash payments for materials and other expenses. PHOTOS BY JUNE SU

By RYAN McELROY
Managing Editor

The Special Collections Reading Room is, by design, a quiet space. Researchers pore over the college's archives, marking discoveries in an excited, hush tone only possible in a library. The space — frequented by college students and varied visitors — is marked by a single glass door as the threshold of the archives, the protective line between public and private areas in the collection.

Beyond that door, however, lies the heart of Special Collections.

Walking into the college archives, you immediately encounter a hub of unexpected activity. Student interns buzz around the stacks, collecting materials for their personal collections and playing a scavenger hunt with an old fake mouse. Joseph Watson, preservation manager and archives association, pulls a copy of a beat-up blue-bound book, weighing whether it needs a touch-up in the conservation room. College Archivist Kaitlin Buerge '13 walks back between the stacks, answering intern questions and navigating carts piled with materials to be used for class visits.

Among it all is towering shelves, lined with the treasures of the college.

Mosque lamps from Saudi Arabia. Original Emily Dickinson poems. WRMC tapes from the 1970s. All of this lives back there, below the Davis Atrium and Crossroads Cafe, and all of it is carefully overseen by the staff of Special Collections for current and future use.

"We are the memory of libraries. We stay here to tell students why this matters, and that books in a physical format still teach us something," said Rebekah Irwin, director and curator of Special Collections.

Irwin and the other staff are familiar with the eclectic mix of items in their collection, but no one can know everything about the college's vast repository of its history.

"We have a good grasp of what's back there, but not every individual piece of paper is described, for example," Buerge explained. "Someday we'll find a letter and be like, 'Oh, we didn't know this was in here talking about this specific thing.' And so that's always really exciting."

"We learn things from our researchers all the time, who are specializing in one area and have the time to come and really engage," added Special Collections Public Services and Outreach Specialist Mikaela Taylor '15.

In addition to the discoveries made in the current archives, Special Collections are actively curating new items and documents to add to their collections. Often scheduled class visits and sit-downs with faculty will lead to newly acquired items carefully stacked on designated shelves, waiting to be used for the first time as tools of instruction.

One of the collection's most exciting new acquisitions was a donation of over 300 tapes from WRMC from the 1970s. Featuring old Middlebury radio shows, student debates and possibly pirated content with astrology-themed covers, the files currently live in their boxes until the staff find an outside vendor to digitize them and make them accessible to new listeners.

"These are the kind of big reel to reel tapes you think like the Beatles recorded their first tracks on," Irwin explained, later pointing to boxes and boxes of the tapes that sit in the rear of the archives, waiting for someone to open them up and hit play.

The staff all rely on each other to understand the archives, sometimes working across generations to identify the relics of past students and faculty who used VHS, cassette tapes and other once-innovative methods for recording information

"On any given day, each of us stumbles upon some old format," Irwin added. "Remember, Kaitlin, you came into my office one day and you were like, 'What is this?'"

The mysterious item in question turned out to be a Betamax, a clunkier, less useful relic of the 1970s that was hidden away on a shelf somewhere until Buerge pulled it into the daylight.

"As a child of the 90s I knew it wasn't a VHS tape, but I wasn't really sure what it was," Buerge responded. "It's not uncommon for me to encounter something that I've never seen before and be like, 'What is this?' And then Rebekah says, 'It's a Betamax.'"

A major part of Special Collections is educational opportunities, with classes and their students dropping by the Reading Room on a regular basis to look at materials tailored to courses ranging from economics to American studies. The staff here organized over a hundred workshops last academic year, with 2176 students descending to Davis's lower level for carefully curated sessions in the reading room, according to data collected by Taylor. The number of visitors to their collections has skyrocketed in recent years in the wake of Covid-19; the staff saw an increase in visitors of 324% in 2021-2022 compared to the previous year, with a more modest 13% increase in 2022-2023.

"In a typical week for us, we're definitely seeing more classes than your average faculty sees, classes that we're preparing for and seeing come through the doors," Irwin said with a laugh.

Special Collections' focus on education is a unique feature of an institutional archive, which prides itself on easy access to rare archival materials — vintage film, animal-skin manuscripts from the 15th century and decades-old oral histories — for the many undergraduates who pass through.

"The only reason we have all the other collections outside of the [college] archives is to use them as an educational tool," Watson explained, adding they want the resources to be used carefully as tools to educate about the importance of physical media.

Many professors are what they call "archival rockstars" and "frequent fliers" in Special Collections, perennial visitors with their classes who love to engage in the archives and know exactly what they want to focus on.

"But there are many other faculty members who really trust us," Irwin explained. "I sat down and had an hour-long conversation with one faculty member, but she said, 'I trust you. You are the experts in your collection.'"

Watson explained the latter relationship more bluntly: "Sometimes professors will just say, 'This is my class. Do it.' But other times they're very collaborative."

Taylor has also worked with many groups on campus and in the local community to invite more people into the archives. Recent events include visits from k-12 student groups, senior citizens and student clubs such as the Black Student Union, who held an event last semester organized with Taylor for alumni and current students of color to view records of their organization.

"It can be a community through time," she explained. "We're able to interact with a wider variety of people and see insights from a diverse array of perspectives, rather than just the scholars."

Buerge added that Special Collections is a way for students to be able to connect with the history of their student organizations and students who came before them. Another recent addition to the archives came from a member of Alianza, who deposited a number of flyers and photographs from their club's history to the archives.

"We don't see every bulletin board or every dorm, or by any means, every social media feed that comes through. So some of that we only learn from students who choose to tell us," Irwin said.

The vast size of the ever-growing archives means that the staff must continue to prioritize which materials are collected, brought out and repaired when damaged.

"We have many books in the back that are falling apart, but if they're not being used, they are not our priority when it comes to fixing them," Watson said.

Even the slow loss of materials and degradation of book spines — ideas which might wake other archivists at 3 a.m. in a cold sweat — can be an important lesson for those who visit Special Collections.

"Sometimes the books that are falling apart then become a teaching tool in themselves, because they can show how a book breaks down over time, how materials were put together," Taylor said.

Charlie Keohane '24 works on 20th century letters and records of the college that staff retrieved for her.

The archives includes artifacts from Vermont such as these prints from the Rutland Railroad engine parts, possibly from 1903 or 1904.

Joseph Watson works in the conservation room every Tuesday, repairing books with torn pages, broken spines and other damage.

For the books that require attention — both from the archives and from the library's circulation — Watson intervenes, bringing them to the preservation and conservation room down the hall. By carefully unwrapping strings that hold unbound book covers together or adding weights to allow glue to dry evenly on a spine, he continues a cycle of renewal essential to future students appreciating the collection.

For Special Collections' most precious and difficult repair jobs, Watson will send the items to a specially trained conservator. This year he has taken over much of the repair work after another staff member retired, and hopes to continue learning specialized techniques to enhance his craft.

With his work — and the efforts of Taylor, Irwin, Buerge and all who came before them — comes a quiet dignity. At the heart of Special Collections is an assertion of the importance of the physical spaces, of preserving knowledge for future use and of marking meaning in any shape it comes. In recent years the archive has developed digital tools to mirror the college's shift online, where controversies and crucial updates are constantly relayed, a space in which Digital Projects & Archives Librarian Patrick Wallace works.

"We'll often say that the history of the college is up to five minutes ago when something happened or Laurie Patton sends out the most recent email," Irwin said, adding that the archives are a continuous, living space for everything that happens here, even what is online. That ability to adapt and remain relevant is a testament to the commitment of the Special Collections team.

"If there were any kind of resource on this campus that was empty, filled with things unused by students, I think someone on this campus and the administration might wonder what is the value of this unused space or these unused collections," Irwin said. "Luckily, we can all say for the time we've been here, that's not been the case."

Even if a student only comes to the archives once in their four years here for a distribution requirement class, the staff hopes to leave with the student a lasting appreciation for the physical world in an age that in some respects has left the physical, the paper, behind.

"At least they'll come and then they'll leave, maybe thinking, 'Oh, this matters,'" Irwin explained.

Over 300 WRMC tapes from the 1970s wait in boxes and tins to be sent to an outside curator who possesses the proper equipment to digitize audio sources from 60 years ago.